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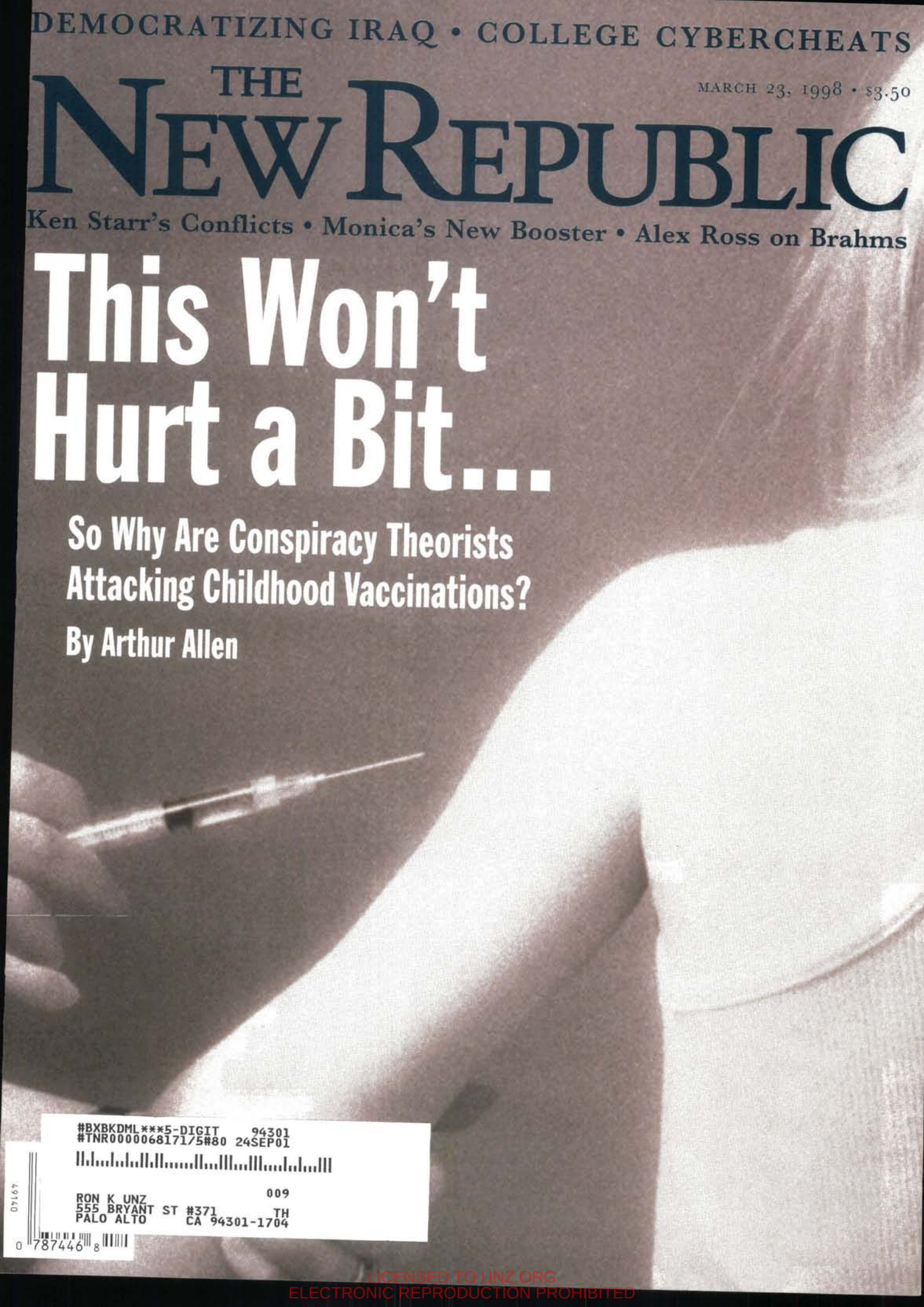

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# THE NEW REPUBLIC

*A Weekly Journal of Opinion*

**MARCH 23, 1998**

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## The end of privacy

**To the editors:**

Jeffrey Rosen is right to suggest that the Supreme Court's craven refusal to enforce the procedural protections enshrined in the Bill of Rights—including the Fourth Amendment's prohibition of unreasonable searches and seizures—has given Kenneth Starr the kind of prosecutorial powers that Joseph Stalin would have looked upon with envy ("The End of Privacy," February 16). But it's hard to feel very sorry for our prurient president, who is being torn to pieces by the judicial monster he helped create and perpetuate.

In insisting on making it easier for the police to eavesdrop on modern digital communications, in endorsing the power of the government to seize private property on the flimsiest pretext, and in continuing the senseless hate campaign against drug users started by President Nixon (which has given rise to the notorious "drug exception" to the Constitution), Clinton has proven himself a staunch defender of the right of the government to oppress its citizens.

The nomination of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has proven to be Clinton's greatest disappointment and, if poetic justice prevails here, may ultimately be Clinton's downfall (if she ends up providing the swing vote to uphold the prosecutorial tactics on Starr's part that many of us find so distasteful). Clinton's other Supreme Court appointment, Justice Stephen Breyer, has not been much better.

President Clinton's problem is of his own making, and watching him endure Starr's predatory and invasive (but completely "lawful" and "constitutional") tactics engenders the same kind of satisfaction we feel when a terrorist is mortally wounded by one of his own bombs.

NOAH ELIEZER YANICH
*Rochester Hills, Michigan*

**To the editors:**

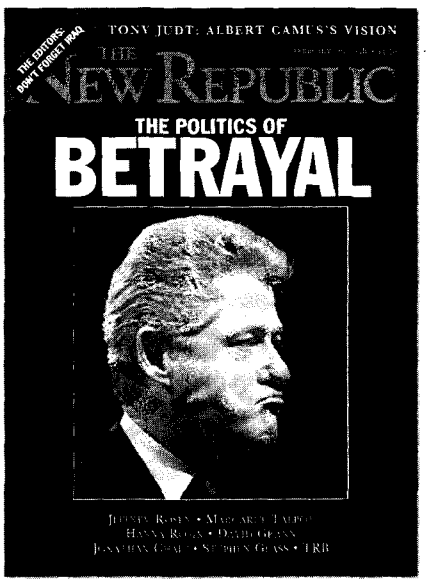
According to Jeffrey Rosen, the sex life of an incumbent president should not be subject to public scrutiny or legal consequences. But a good case could be made to the contrary.

The private conduct of the president should be no more shielded from this type of investigation than that of the citizens in uniform that he commands. The president is commander-in-chief of the U.S. armed forces, which prohibits adultery as well as certain other sexual activities. As a handful of recent cases illustrate, the rules are enforced today, and several military officers have been discharged (or obliged to resign) for violating them.

One could argue that whatever harm may be done to military morale or effectiveness by an officer's sexual misconduct is proportionate to that officer's rank and number of subordinates. If so, such misconduct by the president would be more deleterious than if committed by anyone else in the chain of command.

Either the rules curtailing sexual conduct by military personnel ought to be abolished, or they should be applied to the commander-in-chief. Ultimately, Congress must make this choice.

GERALD S. GLAZER
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*




## Starr search

**To the editors:**

Charles Lane writes, "if the president lied in a sworn deposition" and subborned perjury with bribes, this "might" render him incapable "and hence unfit" to be president ("Starr Chamber," February 16). He suggests that satisfaction with the economy and 60 percent approval ratings somehow diminish such crimes and should be weighed against "the president's criminal liability," claiming that nothing in the president's conduct would constitute a "violation of his oath." (Apparently the president no longer swears to uphold the laws of the United States.)

Lane's depiction of Starr as a "scary, police-state" inquisitor raises questions: How serious are the federal crimes that a president may commit as long as he retains his effectiveness? If the Dow Jones industrial average were lower and unemployment higher, would the president suddenly cease to be above the law? Conversely, if Democrats still controlled Congress, would his enhanced effectiveness render even more serious crimes permissible? How high, indeed, must his approval ratings be before, say, blackmail and intimidation, rather than mere perjury and bribes, become acceptable to the ethically high-minded editors at TNR?

RICHARD STONE
*Somerville, Massachusetts*

**To the editors:**

When Charles Lane has finished weeping for our embattled president's loss of rights and due process, he might dry his eyes and take a clear look at the Clinton civil liberties record. Where has Lane been for the past six years? This president has spent a presidential term and a half expanding not just the size but the powers of the government. His enthusiasm for that government, and its ability to do good, is so unshakable that he cannot conceive of it ever doing harm.

In their now-famous 1992 "60 Minutes" appearance, he and the future first lady complained, properly, of the absence of a zone of privacy. The subsequent narrowing of that zone is the president's own doing. It is very difficult to feel sympathy for him now that it threatens to be his undoing.

BRIAN BISSONETTE
*Alexandria, Virginia*

## Stalin sanguinity

**To the editors:**

Lee Siegel ("From Stalin to SoHo," February 16) quotes me as having "cheerfully" written that "everyone has a little Stalin lurking somewhere within." How pleasantly Panglossian for him to assume that the magnitude of Stalin's crimes puts him beyond the pale of our own experience. If Bolshevism launched purges and created gulags, then capitalism, its adversary, is perforce virtuous; self-examination is unnecessary and dissent is a career move. And this ideological Prozac is available without a prescription! But, really, downsizers and property developers and information czars and rentiers everywhere should erect a little shrine to Stalin in a corner of their offices. He is their fairy godfather, who cleanses them with the wand of his counterexample. The facile Siegel can similarly thank *Pravda* for a thorough grounding in half-truth.

LUC SANTE
*Brooklyn, New York*

**Lee Siegel replies:**

I never said that dissent is a career move. I said that dissent is a career move for

*continued on page 41*



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*A Message from Negative Population Growth, Inc.*

# *Why We Need A Smaller U.S. Population And How We Can Achieve It*

We need a smaller population in order to halt the destruction of our environment, and to create an economy that will be **sustainable** over the very long term.

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**If present immigration and fertility rates continue, our population, now over 269 million, will pass 400 million by the year 2050 -- and still be growing rapidly!**

All efforts to save our environment will ultimately be futile unless we not only halt U.S. population growth, but reverse it, so that our population can eventually be stabilized at a **sustainable** level -- far lower than it is today.

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The central issue is surely this: **At what size should we seek to stabilize U.S. population?** Unless we know in what direction we should be headed, how can we possibly devise sensible policies to get us there?

The size at which our population is eventually stabilized is supremely important because of the effect of sheer numbers of people on such vitally important national goals as a healthy environment, and a sustainable economy.

We believe these goals can best be achieved with a U.S. population in the range of 125 to 150 million, or about its size in the 1940s. This optimum size could be reached in about three to four generations if we do two things now that are well within our grasp.

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1. **Halt illegal immigration and reduce annual legal immigration to not more than 100,000, including all relatives, refugees and asylees.** Then, immigration will no longer contribute significantly to our population growth, as it does now.

2. **Lower our fertility rate** (the average number of children per woman) from the present 2.1 to around 1.5 and maintain it at that level for several decades. We believe that non-coercive financial incentives will be necessary in order to reach that goal.

If almost all women had no more than two children, our fertility rate would drop to around 1.5, because many women remain childless by choice, or choose to have not more than one child. **We promote the ideal of the two-child maximum family as the social norm, because that is the key to lowering our fertility.**

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NPG proposes these incentives to motivate parents to have no more than two children:

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## Two Vastly Different Paths Lie Before Us

With the reductions in immigration and fertility we advocate, our nation could start **now** on the path toward a sustainable, and prosperous, population of 125 to 150 million.

Without such a program, we are almost certain to continue our mindless, headlong rush down our current path. That path is leading us straight toward catastrophic population levels that can only devastate our environment, and produce universal poverty in a crowded, polluted nation.

If you agree that we need to work toward a smaller U.S. population, we need your support. **NPG is the only organization that calls for a smaller U.S. and world population, and for specific, realistic measures to achieve those goals.**

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## FROM WASHINGTON

# Strange allies

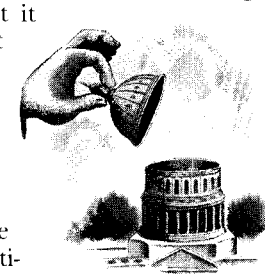
By the time you read this, the Senate will be on the verge of ratifying the entrance of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into NATO. And so the "left-right" Coalition Against NATO Expansion (CANE) will have failed. Having failed, it will probably dissolve quickly. The America-firsters of Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and the nuclear-freezers of Peace Action are not likely to keep hanging out together just for the heck of it.

But that won't mean that the coalition didn't matter. CANE exemplifies the forces coming together to challenge America's internationalist establishment—forces that have been more or less successful depending on the particular issue, but which keep reassembling. These forces are left-wing universalism and right-wing relativism. They parallel the forces that brought down American internationalism a generation ago—except that, back then, the universalism was on the right and the relativism was on the left. Today, it's the reverse.

CANE came about by chance. Its founders, William Lind and John Isaacs, knew each other in the late '60s at Dartmouth. Over the years, they kept in touch, even though Lind worked for the hard-right Free Congress Foundation, and Isaacs headed the peacenik Council for a Livable World Education Fund. Then, last summer, they discovered that they finally agreed on something: they both opposed NATO expansion. With the push for expansion steamrolling all domestic opposition, they decided to take their "strange bedfellows" shtick public. Lind recruited the Eagle Forum, the hawkish American Defense Institute, and the libertarian CATO Institute's Ted Galen Carpenter. Isaacs brought in Peace Action, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the Center for Defense Information, which wants to cut Pentagon spending. In January of this year, CANE opened for business.

At first glance, Isaacs and his fellow lefties' opposition to NATO expansion follows logically from their cold war stance: they oppose American military intervention overseas. But the consistency is less real than it appears. In Vietnam and Nicaragua, the left argued that America had no right to force its system of government on poor, weak countries with political cultures different from our own. Third World nationalism, cloaked in anti-imperialist rhetoric, crippled the left's confidence in the universal application of Western principles.

But, today, the left is overflowing with universalist fervor. Groups like the Council for a Livable World and the Union of Concerned Scientists enthusiastically support peacekeeping operations that export democracy and human rights at the point of a gun. Their problem with NATO is that it isn't universal enough: it excludes Russia even though Russia is a democracy and a part of Europe. By this logic, it is NATO expansion, rather than any inherent intra-European conflict, that threatens the dream of an undivided continent. Gordon Clark of Peace Action says that there is "not one chance in a hundred thousand" that Russia, if left alone, would retake the Baltic states. Tomas Valasek of the Center for Defense Information writes that NATO is "creating its own demons."



Instead of NATO expansion, the lefties want a U.N. standing army or maybe some European regional equivalent. A few "renegade" leaders might resist violations of their sovereignty, but, since their grounds for resistance would likely be ethnic purity or religious fundamentalism rather than socialism, overriding them wouldn't trouble the leftist conscience.

But, while the end of the socialist critique has spurred a new leftist universalism, it has had the opposite effect on the right. In a strange reversal of the Vietnam debate, right-wing opponents of NATO expansion reject any natural harmony between America's principles and those of other cultures. William Lind says: "That's the great Wilsonian fantasy—the notion that you can export institutions which have only grown up in a few places." Conservatives once hailed valiant anti-Communist Poles and Czechs inspired by the Bible and the Declaration of Independence, but NATO's right-wing opponents now see Eastern Europeans as prone to chronic and meaningless internecine feuds.

Instead of American action to activate Europe's new moral consensus, the conservatives in CANE say the key to European peace is dividing the continent among regional powers, which, through their familiarity with local culture, will manage their section of the continent responsibly. Thus, Lind calls on America to recognize Moscow's sphere of influence, arguing that "the notion that the Baltic states can exist hostile to Russia is nonsense." The American Defense Institute proposes that Germany assume informal dominion over Central Europe. All the conservatives agree that, as long as these powers do not directly threaten the U.S., America should let them do what they want.

CANE matters not because of its influence on the NATO fight, but because its ideological tendencies have surfaced in other Washington debates and will surface again. Last fall, the Buchananite right in Congress opposed fast-track trading authority because it feared that increased economic integration would undermine U.S. sovereignty. Many on the left, by contrast, argued that fast track was unacceptable because the integration didn't go far enough. They insisted that any future trade deal establish not just transnational trading rules, but transnational labor and environmental standards as well. As a result, fast track failed altogether. A similar dynamic motivates the left-right opposition to the IMF's Asia bailout: conservative opponents of the deal reject public interference in the Asian economies, while leftist opponents reject the proposed interference as too limited.

In these coalitions, one can see a mirror image of the dynamic that wrecked American internationalism in the '60s and '70s. At that time, the left berated the architects of anti-communism for imposing American values abroad, and the right scorned the policy of containment as half-hearted and unworthy of American principles. The establishment center, which in the early '60s had seemed so broad and robust, had a decade later been whittled down to political insufficiency.

Today, it is generally the left that rejects internationalism as inadequate and the right that rejects it as overreaching. And, very often, the alienation that both feel toward the foreign policy establishment leads them to join heterogeneous coalitions to block Clinton administration initiatives, even though such coalitions cannot offer a coherent alternative. This is the public policy harvest sown by the populist rage of the 1992 and 1994 elections. The Coalition Against NATO Expansion is not the last of its bitter fruit.

**PETER BEINART**



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MARCH 23, 1998

# SCHOOL SPIRIT

Every few years, we get a new report on the crisis of American education, rehearsing a litany of familiar woes. Teachers can't teach. Students can't learn. Remember the 1983 report called "A Nation At Risk"? Its dire prediction: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." Again and again, the experts warn that American students lag behind their foreign counterparts and that this is rendering the United States incapable of keeping up with international economic competition. Now come the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study released on February 24. According to the TIMSS, American twelfth-graders rank below even their Lithuanian counterparts when it comes to general math knowledge. "There is something wrong with the system," said a duly alarmed President Clinton, while Secretary of Education Richard Riley chimed in that the results are "unacceptable."

So how come America's economic—and military—preeminence is as great as it has ever been, if not greater? Clearly, the connection between the test scores of our students and the economic performance of our society is not quite as linear as the doomsayers would have it. Indeed, as testing expert Gerald W. Bracey shows in the March–April *American Prospect*, there is no correlation between the TIMSS and the ranking of the U.S. for international competitiveness by the World Economic Forum. "Schools," Bracey writes, "are not responsible for the fluctuating state of the economy."

One reason for this is that the tests can't measure the intangible sources of dynamism in the U.S. economy, such as the freedom we give to entrepreneurs, or even the way our system sometimes rewards the quirky but brilliant thinker who may not do well in school. These characteristics of American society probably also help explain why so many of the rest of the world's math and science geniuses choose to live and work in the United States.

Furthermore, it's always tricky to compare test scores from one country with those from another country. The United States test-taking population represents a wide swath of society. In the European countries, however, school systems engage in a relatively aggressive form of what Americans deride as "tracking": the best students are encouraged to stay in school and pursue an academic curriculum, while less able students are steered toward vocational training. The U.S. also asks schools to do far more than just teach. It's doubtful that Lithuania's schools serve as virtual surrogate families for their pupils, as do many beleaguered inner-city schools in this country.

Obviously, there is room for improving U.S. schools. But the focus should not be on the population's overall academic performance, as compared to that of not-so-comparable foreign societies. It should be on the disparities in performance among American students—on the fact that some students leave school without basic math and language abilities, to say nothing of the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly high-tech economy.

Two measures might help. First: decrease schools' heavy reliance on local property taxes—which of course vary widely depending on local property values, a pretty good proxy for wealth. This is an issue for state legislatures and state courts, and it will increasingly be an issue for the federal government. As the population ages, many localities may become less willing to spend tax dollars on school districts. School districts will look not just to state capitals but to Washington, and they deserve the support. Second: national standards. Funding alone is no panacea; some of the worst urban school systems spend the most per student. Thus, the Clinton administration must continue to push for national standards. This would prod school districts to perform and would highlight—for the right reasons—the failures.

Neither of these two steps has much political potential at the moment. Equalizing school funding is anathema to many on the right; conservatives would prefer a system of school vouchers. Liberals, meanwhile, put too much faith in the ability of cash to cure educational woes. And, on the left, many continue to oppose national standards that might underscore poor academic performance by minority groups. (Many conservatives oppose standards as well, but their objections center on perceived federal intrusions on local autonomy.)

But one way to make progress on both issues might be to stop worrying so much about international competitiveness and emphasize American democracy's need for a broad-based, highly skilled middle class made up of educated citizens. For too long, the education debate has depicted schooling narrowly as an economic tool rather than as a source of both economic and political health. Changing that is the first step toward making the education debate itself a little smarter. •



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# NOTEBOOK

UNDONE DEAL: The Clinton administration has claimed that Kofi Annan's deal with Saddam Hussein will make it easier for the United States to garner international support for a future military strike against Iraq. Russia, France, and China wouldn't endorse American bombing without giving diplomacy a last chance, but now if Saddam breaks his word, they'll have to. So how come Russia, France, and China opposed any Security Council resolution that would even seem to give the U.S. a "green light" to bomb if Saddam reneges? Emboldened by this show of "coalition" unity, Iraq began to rewrite the Annan deal; an official claimed it includes an "understanding" that weapons inspections will not be open-ended, but will end "within a reasonable time." Plainly, then, Annan's deal is already on its way to being violated, and plainly the Russians, French, and Chinese will never support U.S. military action, no matter how much solicitude the U.S. shows them. Apprised of Iraq's revised view of the Annan deal, White House spokesman Mike McCurry replied, "I would disregard what the government of Iraq has to say when they're in spin mode." Given the administration's flimsy performance, that advice would seem to apply to U.S. statements, too.

FAST AND LUCE: "The idea behind the party," said a *Time* spokesperson, "was to bring together the greatest storytellers of our age in one room, so they could meet, face-to-face, as they meet in the pages of the magazine." And so two of the greatest storytellers of our age, Bill Clinton and William Ginsburg, were present at the magazine's seventy-fifth birthday party at Radio City Music Hall. Did they meet face-to-face, as they do in the pages of the magazine? If they did, their encounter would have been upstaged by the world-historical grossness of its setting. *Time* may have hoped to honor the gravity of its time—"the one hundred stunning years that your founder Henry Luce so unforgettably called the American Century," as the president described it—but this crass Fellini-esque orgy of face recognition and name recognition had the opposite effect. For one night, the American Century was drained of its gravity. At Radio City the secular beatification that we call "celebrity" was attached also to Jack Kevorkian and Louis Farrakhan and Imelda Marcos. They, too, sizzled. And there was worse: the *New York Post* reported that "the guest list featured Steven Spielberg, who made *Schindler's List* about the horrors of the Holocaust—plus Adolf Hitler's favorite filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl." Why Leni Riefenstahl? Perhaps *Time* couldn't locate Martin Bormann's address. The important point is that infamy is just another variety of fame. Look at the photographs (which are all that matter, anyway) of these dizzy, overdone people, arriving in their shared belief in the sanctity of glamour and in their instantly obsolete silks to congratulate one another on being in one another's company: you will not see images of power or beauty, you will see only images of a frantic, amoral, moneyed emptiness. So pity the planet's icons. They do not understand that there is nothing in the world less real than a party. And pity *Time*, which went to all this trouble—Muhammad Ali! Mikhail Gorbachev! Raquel Welch!—to prove that it is just the company's beard for *People*.

WELCOME TO GUCCI GULCH, SILICON VALLEY: Last week, the Senate Judiciary Committee heard from Bill Gates and his rivals on the future of competition in the computer business. "There's a lot of expensive shoes out there is all I can say," Chairman Orrin Hatch quipped during the testimony of Netscape CEO James Barksdale. And indeed there were. As the Republican from Utah is well aware—his state has a burgeoning computer industry—the political isolation of the techno-millionaires is over. Their Washington coming-out party at the Judiciary Committee was the perfect setting for lawmakers to preen before the men who control America's last great untapped reserve of campaign contributions. The committee poked and prodded Gates about his alleged monopolistic tendencies, but the real target may have been new PACs, such as Technology Network, or TechNet, founded last July by Barksdale and venture capitalist John Doerr, who raised $40 million in 1996 to defeat a California ballot initiative that would have made it easier to sue high-tech companies. Since July, TechNet has raised roughly a million dollars for each of the two parties.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: Due to an editor's error, an incorrect effective date for Federal Rule of Evidence 415 was given in Jeffrey Rosen's article "I Pry" last week. The correct date is July 9, 1995. •

**Monica's lusty new champion.**

# ROSIE THE RIVETER

*By Hanna Rosin*

The New York lawyer who sent the first $10,000 check to Monica Lewinsky's defense fund naturally has few kind words to offer Paula Jones—except, that is, for a little womanly advice. "If I were in that room I would not have started a lawsuit," says Rosalie Osias, pausing like an aging starlet to take another drag on her Marlboro. "I would have closed that door; I would have been alone with him; and then I would have been appointed secretary of state." Indeed, it seems only an accident of geography that



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Osias was not in that room; from her Farrah Fawcett mane to her Barbie lashes, from the very visible cleavage under her sequin-studded jacket to her invisible skirt, Osias is unmistakably Bill Clinton's type.

Osias is the latest of the bit characters to pop up as a TV spokesperson for Monica Lewinsky. Her version of Monica's story, as she's told Wolf Blitzer and Cokie Roberts and anyone else who will listen, is that Monica is our new feminist heroine, doing what every smart woman should: "using her sexuality" at work, where it counts the most. Men, after all, use golf and football to bond. To level the playing field, women need to show a little leg. "Monica," she says proudly, "has good natural instincts. She dressed more provocatively. She inherently desired this alignment with a sexy, powerful man." Osias adds, with no apparent irony: "I'm hoping she read some of my articles, and that that's why she did what she did."

Monica, in Osias's view, is not a bumbling valley girl with a weight problem but a glamorous courtesan, in the grand tradition of Madame de Pompadour, who seduced Louis XV during a masked ball and then whispered policy advice into his ear. It's a skill Monica can reteach America's women, a skill wiped out by what Osias calls the "cancerous mutation" known as feminists who "dress miserably and look more like men than men." Osias styles herself as a one-woman antidote to this trend. Imagine La Pompadour with a thick Long Island accent and Joan Rivers's filthy mouth. "If he pulled down his pants, I would have said, 'Very nice, I'm sorry I didn't bring my camera,'" she says, returning to the Paula Jones theme. "And if the penis had gone sideways I would have said, 'Hmmm, that must be hard on a cheek.' I mean, I should be so lucky for Bill Clinton to pull down his pants in front of me. Uch, my gawd, this man would owe me for life!"

The sisterhood is not heeding Osias's call to arms. Indeed, on the left and on the right, women have reacted with one big rictus of horror. "I was kind of astounded," said Karen Johnson, a vice president at the National Organization for Women. "My word, in this day and age, does someone really feel this way?" After Osias left the set, a gaggle of ABC gals exchanged tsk-tsks on the air. "I mean, she came to morning television wearing a micro-miniskirt!" Cynthia McFadden complained to Cokie Roberts. (To which Osias later responded, "She was lucky I didn't wear my leather outfit.") Conservatives were no less shocked. "You are saying women should align themselves with powerful men?" gaped Arianna Huffington. "I find this a staggering statement in 1998. We don't need to define ourselves through powerful men. This sends us back to the nineteenth century." (To which Osias responds, even more aptly, "Arianna? It's not for nothing she married fifty-million-dollars worth of man.") The whole female reaction was summed up by one irate *Newsday* reader who wrote in after one of Osias's op-eds: "What planet does she come from and would she please go back."

"I'm calling their bluff," Osias bites back, and she's right. These women may think of Osias as an alien, but she is actually something more menacing. For both the left and right, she represents the logical extreme of their own views; she lays bare their various hypocrisies and comforting self-delusions. Take the liberal lipstick feminists. Last month, a group of them—Katie Roiphe, Elizabeth Benedict, Erica Jong, Nancy Friday, Patricia Marx—got together to swagger like truckers about Bill and Monica, a horrible, smug conversation reprinted in the *New York Observer*. "DID SHE SWALLOW?" read the tantalizing headline. "This virile president is suddenly fulfilling this forbidden fantasy of this old-fashioned, taboo aggressive male," mused Roiphe. But the new pedantic vulgarati are playacting. Safe in the confines of the New York literary world, they can swear like stevedores, then go home to their sensitive writer boyfriends. Faced with a slobbering, balding banker placing a beefy hand on their thigh, they would flee in disgust and then call the NOW police.

But Osias takes the Erica Jong revolution at its word. "If a man in my office wants to touch me or say dirty things to me, I invite that," she told me earnestly. "Especially if that person can help me." And God forbid you should say a word about sexual harassment. "I think these women who sue are major losers," she says angrily. "They're just looking for fifteen minutes of fame they couldn't get in their own careers. Do you know what these lawsuits are really doing to bankers and major partners in law firms? The CEOs are just closing their doors to women. They don't need this garbage. They don't need these psychiatrists coming in to teach them how not to be men, how not to have erections, how not to think of the women around them all day."

As for the social conservatives, Osias too believes that men should be men and women women, that the natural biological order should reign. Before the last campaign, Danielle Crittenden of the Independent Women's Forum wrote a coquettish defense of Bob Dole as the woman's ideal of a he-man, and Osias wrote the mirror-image piece about Clinton. But Osias understands that the old way has consequences; that, once they're unleashed, the real men won't ask nicely anymore. "We're two animals," she explains. "We mate. There's a reason we respond how we do."

Unlike the rest of these liberated women, Osias lives her philosophy. In 1984, she got a job at "one of the biggest law firms in the country" (she won't say which one), and, at first, she conformed. She wore gray suits down to the knee, no makeup, glasses, flats. "I looked as ugly as I possibly could," she recalls. "And you know what, all the women there got tremendous respect; we just didn't get any good work." One day, she decided to conduct an experiment. Every day at 7:30 a.m., the most important real estate lawyer in the firm ("brilliant, sexy, a womanizer") would make the rounds of associates' offices to make sure they were all in. "I came in wearing a little top more open than this one, spikes, with my hair down, and I looked like who I was, Rosie Osias." That day, he came into her office, asked what she was reading, and invited her to a meeting of the partners.



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"Now you're gonna ask me, 'Did he really want you to be a great lawyer, or did he want to sleep with you?' Well, you know the answer to that, he wanted to sleep with me. He's a man, and I'm a woman. But, you know, the most beautiful cleavage can only hold a man's attention so long. Eventually, he has to listen to what you say. And the most overwhelming thing in the world is a woman who's sexy and smart as hell. That doesn't mean you bring your couch into his room, and it doesn't mean you service him. It just means you manipulate him to get what you want."

When she left the firm, Osias got even more brazen. She decided the real money was in mortgage banking, but the field was run by a tight network of men. She knocked on doors and got no response, except for an occasional banker telling her she was "cute." Then, she took out a series of full-page, Rosie-the-Dominatrix ads in industry newsletters such as *Mortgage Press* and *Mortgage Report*: Rosie in black spiked heels cradling a phallic golf club ("WE DON'T PLAY GOLF . . . WE'RE TOO BUSY CLOSING YOUR LOANS ON TIME"). Rosie the cowgirl, holding a cigar ("TRY THIS NON-CONFORMING LAW FIRM"). Rosie on a gleaming Harley ("WE WILL RIDE ANYTHING . . . TO GET TO YOUR CLOSING ON TIME"). Rosie in a black bustier and patent-leather go-go boots, bound by a rope to four men facing backwards ("YOU CAN ALWAYS RELY ON OUR STRONGEST 'ASSETS' TO CLOSE YOUR LOAN").

The ads prompted the New York Bar's Grievance Committee to investigate. But they also got her business. At industry parties, "major presidents of major banks were flying, and I mean flying, across the ballroom floor to meet me." They invited her to dinner. They leered; they slobbered. She teased them for weeks. Eventually, they threw some business her way. That year she went from handling zero to as many as 50 loans a week, from major banks like Citicorp, Chemical, and Greenpoint. She opened three offices to handle the business, hired a public relations firm to handle the media, and picked a personal shopper in Paris to handle the leather.

Osias can be shockingly cynical about sex, and power, and money, and all the '80s excesses for which we have all repented. As a married mother of two, she shrugs off the concept of homewrecking, or bad mothers, or anything that smacks of a cherished family value, without blinking. "I don't know what you mean by married. You don't think women sleep outside their marriage?" she says, and then piles it on with Gordon Gecko cool. "We're talking about power and money here. If you're not willing to give up those eight months of bonding with the baby, if you're not willing to walk over the dead bodies, then you don't have it."

The cynicism is less swagger than a strange kind of nostalgia. Maybe it's true that, in Rosalie's world of old lecherous CEOs, everyone sleeps around, but, thankfully, Rosalie's world is a dying one. So Rosalie has to squeeze what she can out of it before the well dries up. "There is more money to be made, more offices to be opened," says Osias, running to catch her limo for her next TV appearance. And her 15 minutes are almost over. •

**Ken Starr's moonlighting.**

# DOUBLE DIPPER

*By Robert Dreyfuss*

It was April 1996, and the American tobacco industry was enmeshed not only in a quarrel with the Clinton administration, but also in a class action suit in which Big Tobacco stood accused of deceptively addicting smokers to nicotine. A federal district court in New Orleans had certified Dianne Castano as a representative of all U.S. smokers—something like 50 million plaintiffs. This ruling was potentially disastrous, so the cigarette makers needed top-flight representation to get it overturned on appeal.

The call went out to a former federal circuit judge, former solicitor general of the United States, and partner at the blue-chip law firm of Kirkland & Ellis: Kenneth W. Starr. Already a veteran of the tobacco wars—he represented Brown & Williamson, the nation's third-largest tobacco company—Starr appeared before a three-judge panel of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals and argued that the class of 50 million plaintiffs should never have been certified because it was too large and complex for a single court to handle. The court agreed, and now the plaintiffs have retreated to smaller class actions in state courts.

Having won that battle, Starr went back to his other job: independent counsel investigating President Clinton in the Whitewater matter. Starr's simultaneous service as both the appellate advocate of Clinton's enemies and the ostensibly disinterested seeker of the truth about Whitewater raised more than a few eyebrows. "To me, it was incredible. Here was the independent counsel against Clinton, and Clinton was the tobacco industry's nemesis, and everything was at full war at the time. And to have him sitting there representing tobacco!" fumes John Coale, who litigated the Castano appeal against Starr. "As a lawyer, this was a raving conflict of interest."

Indeed, that's the way it looks to many people who aren't lawyers. But what's really incredible is that Starr's work on behalf of private clients is perfectly legal. It may look unseemly for Starr to be collecting compensation both for pursuing the president in a criminal case and for protecting the president's foes in civil matters—or to be spending any time at all on anything other than what is now a nearly five-year-old inquiry. But neither the law that governs independent counsels, nor the Justice Department's regulations, nor even the legal profession's own code of ethics specifically prohibits it.

The last two independent counsels charged with looking into alleged wrongdoing by the White



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House—Iran-Contra investigator Lawrence Walsh and Starr's ill-fated Whitewater predecessor Robert Fiske Jr.—both thought it appropriate to eschew private practice during their tenures. But that was by choice. The Ethics in Government Act says merely that neither the independent counsel nor any of his partners or associates "may represent in any matter any person involved in any investigation or prosecution under this chapter." Thus, those who are not *directly* involved in his inquiry, but who might be indirectly affected by the criminal prosecution of the president, are free to hire Starr. As for the bar's own self-imposed ethical strictures, those, too, are notoriously flexible. Technically, lawyer conflicts are limited to specific instances of an attorney or firm representing clients on opposite sides of the same matter.

No doubt anticipating questions about all of this, Starr has hired august ethical advisers such as the venerable Georgetown Law School Professor Sam Dash, famous for his stellar performance as the Democratic counsel on the Senate Watergate Committee. For a reported salary of $3,200 per week, Dash provides his considered opinion that Starr has abided by both the letter and the spirit of the law. But the recent uproar seems to have driven Dash into the ground. "I'm not commenting," he said when I called him. Asked whether he stands by his earlier statements about Starr—in 1996 Dash indiscreetly conceded to *The New Yorker* that Starr's outside activity had "an odor to it"—Dash replied, "That would be commenting." Beyond noting, correctly, that some other independent counsels have also done outside work, Starr's office won't comment on conflict-of-interest issues, either, referring callers to Kirkland & Ellis. The firm says it conducted a thorough review of its clients to ensure compliance with the Ethics in Government Act.

Thus, since he was appointed independent counsel in August 1994, Starr has pocketed about $4 million in compensation from Kirkland & Ellis, according to the disclosure forms he filed with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics. A great deal of that income has come from Brown & Williamson, which has been beset with problems, legal and political, ever since whistle-blowers began leaking inside information about Brown & Williamson during the early '90s. (Not long after his appearance in the Castano case, Starr unsuccessfully sued the office of Congressman Henry Waxman for the return of leaked Brown & Williamson internal documents.) Starr's other clients have included General Motors, Hughes Aircraft, United Airlines, Bell Atlantic, and Amoco—all companies with a stake in the contracting policies and regulatory decisions of the federal government. And these are just the clients we know about. Taking advantage of loopholes in the law and rules promulgated by the Office of Government Ethics, Starr has declined to provide a complete list of clients he has represented since 1994.

In recent weeks, Representative John Conyers Jr. and Senator Robert Torricelli both have written to Attorney General Janet Reno, calling on her to begin an inquiry into Starr's representation of private clients. Beyond that, it's difficult to see what could be done, unless Starr himself has a change of heart. So far, the courts have refused to come down on Starr.

That could change, however. On March 5, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, an appeals court will hear oral arguments in an ethics case against Starr brought by Francis Mandanici, a gadfly Connecticut attorney. The case has to do with Starr's connections to Pepperdine University. Readers will recall that Starr decided to resign in February 1997 to accept a dual post as head of Pepperdine's law school and new school of public policy. Though the subsequent outcry forced Starr to retract his resignation, the post is being kept open for Starr by Pepperdine, whose endowment is subsidized by the anti-Clinton Scaife foundations.

Mandanici contends that Starr's involvement with Pepperdine requires the court to order an official investigation to determine whether that represents a conflict of interest for the independent counsel. Starr has countered that Mandanici lacks the standing to submit a grievance against him and calls his arguments "vacuous procedural contentions." The federal district court in Little Rock agreed with Starr but didn't hand him a clear-cut victory. Four judges recused themselves—ironically because they were Democrats with ties to Clinton—and one said ruefully that they did so knowing that "our recusal may well confer de facto immunity on the independent counsel, with respect to ethical violations."

Of the four remaining judges, three voted to exonerate Starr, but Judge Garnett Thomas Eisele declined. He wrote: "It is difficult to argue that Mr. Starr is not laboring under at least an appearance of conflict. There is the inevitable appearance that Mr. Starr may consciously or subconsciously tailor his prosecutorial decisions to please his benefactor." Eisele also noted that Starr's own "deputies pressed him to explain the relationship between Pepperdine and Richard Scaife." Eisele's opinion was barely noted at the time, but it served as the basis for Mandanici's successful petition for an appeals court hearing in the Eighth Circuit.

Starr's seeming disregard for appearances should concern you whether you think Bill Clinton is guilty or not. In fact, a case can be made that those who want to see Clinton impeached should be most concerned. If Starr's evidence against the president is ever referred to the House for impeachment proceedings, the case will leave the legal realm for the political one. And there Starr's hairsplitting insistence on following merely the letter of the law will damage his credibility and thus undermine any impeachment effort. If nothing else, Starr's performance should accelerate efforts to reform the independent counsel law when it expires next year. An indispensable element of that reform will be to restrict the ability of the prosecutor to represent outside clients. Future analysts may be able to call Starr at Pepperdine University for comment.

ROBERT DREYFUSS is a freelance journalist in Alexandria, Virginia.



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## THE HARD QUESTIONS

# GOING PUBLIC

*By Jean Bethke Elshtain*

Like many Americans, I believe in maintaining a distinction between public and private life. And that is precisely why the Monica Lewinsky affair makes me question Bill Clinton's character and judgment.

It is certainly true that public life should not become a grand project in which nothing is exempt from scrutiny and control. Indeed, public life suffers when people go public with all sorts of stuff that doesn't belong there. For example, I don't think Vice President Gore's politically motivated recounting of his sister's death from lung cancer belonged at the 1996 Democratic Convention. I don't much care for the now-routine brandishing of cute babies for campaign purposes, no matter who is doing it. I'm not interested in learning the details of someone's marriage or divorce as if this automatically recommends him for, or disqualifies him from, political life. In the case of divorce, that would depend on whether this emerged from a pattern of horrible behavior—drunkenness, violence, habitual philandering—that speaks to traits that reflect upon ability to govern. Ordinary human frailties and weaknesses are just that, ordinary, and thus should not be grist for the public mill.

Yet it is also the Christian view—and this is important because Clinton calls himself a Christian and has said publicly that he disbelieves in parading piety but very much believes in God's mercy and in forgiveness—that once the sinner has recognized the sin, he or she is called to sin no more. God, after all, is not the Great Absolver, validating everything we do. Absent a sincere desire to do better, there is no automatic canceling of the debt.

Despite this, many folks say we should never judge the behavior of another person—particularly the president—as if judgment weren't the heart and soul of politics. But it is. We are called to make discernments based on certain criteria of assessment. And a public official's behavior is part of what we are required to evaluate.

Alas, we seem to have lost the ability to make coherent distinctions in this area. We say, "Everybody does it." But not every president had staffs assigned to "bimbo eruptions." Not every president had a "nuts and sluts" detail. This is a pattern of behavior quite different from Franklin Roosevelt's affair with Lucy Mercer, which he began while he was undersecretary of the Navy. That an ill and lonely Roosevelt renewed the relationship as a friendship during his last years in office is light years removed from a public official deploying a small army of enablers or fixers when his "private" behavior spins out of control. If Dwight Eisenhower had had an affair when he was supreme commander in Europe (and his family vehemently denies he did), well before he became president, that would scarcely have been the same thing as carrying on sexual dalliances—excuse me, alleged dalliances—in one's office and then having staff risk legal trouble to cover them up. To be sure, JFK's retainers saw to it that a brisk traffic in women moved in and out of his living quarters. But at least these assignations were not with star-struck, college-aged interns and did not occur during working hours in the Oval Office.

When most folks worry about this sort of thing, they are not unacceptably eradicating the distinction between public and private. Quite the contrary, they are acknowledging that the distinction was ignored by the president and members of his staff, handlers, and spinners, and that all of us are now reeling in the wake of the mess *they* made. Legal questions aside—and I, for one, would vote not to renew the independent counsel statute when it comes up for renewal next year—this makes it a legitimate public issue. You don't have to be a scandal-sniffer to worry about reckless, perhaps uncontrollable, behavior; to be concerned about the misuse of staff persons who may find their implication in such shenanigans a source of discomfort, if not moral corruption; to fear that by simply inuring ourselves to the whole issue we are engaged in what Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has called "defining deviancy down." To judge the president on this scandal is not to damn him for lack of saintliness; it is to damn him for lack of suitable governing character.

Some say we should wait until all the evidence is in. But we make provisional political judgments all the time based on the preponderance of information available from reliable sources. That evidence is in, and it suggests overwhelmingly that the president himself disdained the public-private distinction. This was not, after all, a discreet relationship. When President Mitterrand died and the fact of his long-term mistress and the child born to her came to light, the vast majority of his countrymen and women were stunned. Why? Because they hadn't known that he had done what Frenchmen seem to like to do and had done it with a developed sense of rectitude and discretion. When Mitterrand paid visits to his ladyfriend, these took place well away from the site of governance. He did not have a staff assigned to facilitate assignations or to tidy up the messes. By contrast, Clinton behaved recklessly in ways that were bound, sooner or later, to catch the public's eye.

And, finally, it is hard to shake the implications of that dismal canard embodied in the president's angry, dismissive words of denial: *that woman*. These two words are a pretty good clue that it is the woman who will take the fall. Should we care? Yes. Not to care at all suggests not salutary sophistication but political and ethical myopia. •



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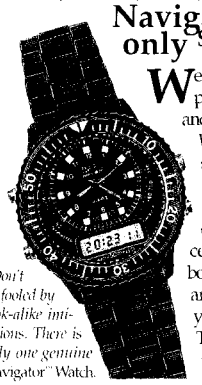

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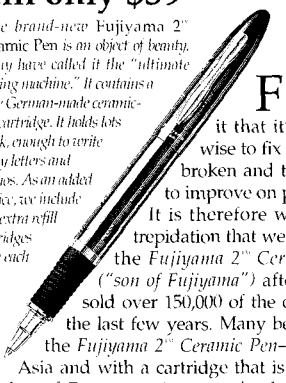

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**Term-paper shopping online.**

# CYBERCHEATS

*By John N. Hickman*

It's four o'clock in the morning, you're just one page into a 15-page term paper that's due at ten o'clock, and the teaching assistant isn't giving extensions. A few years ago, that would have been it: You would have passed in the paper late, if at all, and dealt with the consequences. But this is 1998, and so, in your most desperate hour, you try a desperate ploy. You log on to the World Wide Web (the university has very generously connected every dorm room to the Internet), enter "term papers" into an online search engine, and find your way to www.a1-termpaper.com. There you scroll down past the big red disclaimer ("All work offered is for research purposes only"), find a paper that fits the assignment, enter your credit card number, and then wait until the file shows up in your college e-mail account. You feel a little ashamed, but, hey, the course was just a distribution requirement, anyway. You put your own name on the title page, print it out, and set the alarm for nine o'clock.

A few years ago, "A1 Termpaper" would have been just another tiny ad in the classifieds of *Rolling Stone* or *National Lampoon*—hardly a temptation for most self-respecting students, and hardly a worry for any serious institution of higher learning. But the Web now features dozens of similar sites—from the "Evil House of Cheat" to "Research Papers Online"—which enable students to purchase ready-made term papers on a wide variety of subjects.

The companies, of course, maintain they are merely providing learning materials for inquisitive students. But there's good reason to think online plagiarism is becoming a real problem on college campuses. The Evil House of Cheat page now boasts over one million hits; A1 Termpaper claims thousands. Although a "hit" is a visit, not a sale, it is hard to imagine that thousands of students—at least 8,000 a week—are visiting these sites, and no one is buying. A spokesman for "The Paper Store" told me that his company's yearly traffic in papers was "well in the thousands." The owner of A1 Termpaper says that he has sold between 1,000 and 2,000 papers in his first year of operation. According to Anthony Krier, a research librarian at Franklin Pierce College in Rindge, New Hampshire, and a widely quoted source on Internet plagiarism (he maintains a database of term-paper websites), the number of term-paper sites has swelled from 28 in the beginning of 1997 to 72 today. "Does the increase in the number of sites translate into an increase in cheating? Certainly," says Krier. "There's no doubt about it. People have got to realize the problem is not going away until they start taking it seriously."

At least one school, Boston University, is. Last year, it became sufficiently worried about online plagiarism that it launched a sting operation, in which a law student posed as an undergraduate in search of a paper on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. In October, the university—which has been dogging term-paper mills for 25 years—filed suit against eight of the companies it claims to have snagged in the ruse, charging them with mail and wire fraud, racketeering, and breaking a Massachusetts law against term-paper sales.

But B.U. is the exception. Harvard University's Thurston Smith, secretary to the administrative board, is serenely confident that Internet plagiarism is not a problem at Harvard. "I'm sure it's going on somewhere," he says. "I just have to believe Harvard students would have too much respect for the faculty." Just as sanguine are administrators at Bucknell, Dartmouth, and Yale. Terri Barbuto, secretary of the executive committee, Yale's disciplinary body, insists, "It really hasn't been a problem at Yale."

My own sampling of student opinion suggests otherwise. One Yale student, for example, told me that, while researching an essay on Shakespeare, he inadvertently stumbled upon a term-paper site and, after asking around, realized that he wasn't the only student tempted by the ease of Internet plagiarism: "Everyone was finding them and keeping their mouths shut. I mean, at Yale, who would admit to having to buy a paper?" A Princeton freshman admitted to me that he had passed in a pilfered English paper: "Come on," he said, "it's just so easy, and the class was a waste of time, anyway."

Just how easy is it? Punching in "term papers" to an Internet search engine like AltaVista yields more than five million matches. The vast majority of these sites are, ironically, administrative warnings about online plagiarism, but among the first 100 listings are links to a handful of term-paper sites. If you click on the link to the Evil House of Cheat (www.cheathouse.com), a dark, fiery-fonted homepage will appear on the screen, featuring links to about 40 other term-paper sites. Many of these linked sites are staggering, library-like catalogs of thousands of prewritten papers. At A1 Termpaper's website, which claims to offer "approximately 20,000 prewritten term papers," you could, for example, purchase the 20-page essay, "Hegel's Theory of Religion," for $179, or acquire ten pages on the IMF for a mere $89.50. Or, if that just-right paper isn't already available, The Paper Store will be happy to compose a special one that fits your needs, for about $15 a page.

The proprietors of these services claim that what they do is legal and honorable. "I help people," says Abe Korn, the man behind "The Term Paper, School, and Business Help Line." Korn, who talks a mile a minute in thick Brooklynese and claims to have been a professor



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at "a very major university," explains that his clients say, "'Abe, help me, I don't know how to write a paper.' I write them one, as an example, and then they go and pass it in. Is that my fault? No. If I help you in physics and work one problem, and you turn that problem in, am I to blame? No. I'm just a tutor."

Of course, a 1973 Massachusetts law forbids the sale of a term paper by someone knowing or "having reason to know" that it will be submitted as somebody else's work. And Texas passed a similar law last year. But, even if selling term papers is potentially illegal, the law can't do much to shut down sites like "School Sucks"—sites where students generously make their own papers available to others for free. By one count, there are 38 free term-paper sites like School Sucks, a page started in 1996 by a former Florida International University student, Kenny Sahr. By last July, School Sucks, which started with one English paper Sahr borrowed from a friend, had grown into a megasite with 2,000 free term papers and a convenient search engine to locate essays by key words. As of January, according to Sahr, his site registered 1,140,690 hits and advertising revenues of $5,000 a month.

Some of these free papers are, by anyone's standards, awful. One paper on *Macbeth* begins: "*Macbeth* is primarily about villains. And the villainy that the play has knows no bounds." Yet other free-paper sites, such as the one designed by Harvard sophomore Dorian Berger, are gems. Dorian's swanky homepage posts about 20 of his generally quite good Harvard papers, free to download.

Even more helpful are pages like "1 Stop Research Paper Shop," which links to 32 scholarly sites, each with free papers posted by altruistically minded academics. Linked to the site: economics papers from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, research works from the NASA Laboratories, papers from the Center for Cognitive Science, like "Mechanics of Sentence Processing," and a trove of essays from an assistant professor of economics at the University of Chicago, Casey Mulligan. The homepage of J. Michael Miller, a teacher at Virginia's Episcopal High School, who has a master's degree in history from Georgetown University and a Ph.D. in Russian History from George Washington University, features five of Miller's college papers, ripe for the picking. Miller is only slightly troubled by the prospects of plagiarism. "It's really up to the individual reader," he says, "to do with the information what they will, good or evil. I belong to the school that says teach people to do the right thing and then turn 'em loose."

Concern over Internet plagiarism has led at least a few educators to contemplate high-tech solutions. Two employees of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Ned Feder and Walter Stewart, have designed a computer program to scan text and recognize word-for-word similarities as short as 32 characters long. Still, the programs have their limits, and, in the end, it's a losing battle. The whole point of the Internet is to share information. To get the benefits of online technology, universities have to cope with the costs. The only real solution to cyberplagiarism, then, is old-fashioned vigilance. Having spent millions of dollars wiring their students to the Internet, universities may have to invest in smaller classes and a better teacher-to-student ratio. A return to some good old analog, face-to-face teaching may be the only way to keep online plagiarism at the fringes, where it belongs.

JOHN N. HICKMAN is a 1997 Yale graduate and currently works as a journalist in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Why did Khrushchev go to the brink?**

# MISSILE MYSTERY

*By Adam Ulam*

For years, most Americans have seen John F. Kennedy's stand in the Cuban missile crisis as a bold feat of statesmanship which changed the course of the cold war by forcing the Soviet Union to beat a retreat. Now, Seymour Hersh, in *The Dark Side of Camelot*, presents the president's action as yet another Kennedy blunder inspired by purely political and partisan considerations. "The Kennedy brothers brought the world to the edge of war in their attempts to turn the dispute into a political asset," Hersh writes. Hersh claims that, once JFK learned the Soviets were secretly installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, he should have given Khrushchev an opportunity to withdraw them in secret. But, instead, he dramatically revealed the Soviet move and simultaneously instituted a blockade of Cuba. To gain a personal triumph, Hersh argues, JFK risked a nuclear holocaust. Then, to preserve the impression of complete American victory, he concealed the fact that, in the end, he did make a trade with Khrushchev: in return for the Soviets' removing their missiles in Cuba, the U.S. promised to remove its Jupiter missiles from Turkey. The only pledge made public by Washington following the Soviets' capitulation was that the U.S. would not invade Cuba.

Whatever one's initial reaction to Hersh's argument, one cannot really assess it without revisiting what is still, after almost four decades, the main historical problem posed by the Cuban missile crisis: What impelled the Soviets to undertake this hugely hazardous gambit? Here, at least, one must agree with Hersh that the crisis remains "the most misunderstood and poorly reported event of the cold war." Why did the Kremlin masters think they could get away with placing their nuclear weapons so close to the United States? What objective was, to their minds, worth the risk?



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When his Soviet colleagues finally obliged him to account for the Cuba affair, Khrushchev gave the following explanation: The missiles were placed in Cuba at Castro's request to protect the island from American invasion. Once the U.S. pledged not to attack Cuba, there was no reason for the Soviets to keep the missiles there. This was obviously untrue. Yet, since the end of the cold war, Moscow's newly opened archives have yielded only scraps of information—nothing that bears on the real internal deliberations of Khrushchev and his Politburo. Thus, as of 1997, Khrushchev's lame excuse remains the official Russian version of the affair, except for a belated admission that the initiative for putting the missiles in Cuba came not from Castro but from Moscow. Even more amazing, this version has been accepted by most Western analysts of the cold war.

But this story defies credulity. Why would the Soviet Union keep nuclear weapons *permanently* in Cuba, where they might not always remain under their control? How could even impulsive Khrushchev, not to mention his prudent Politburo colleagues, believe that the Americans would acquiesce in the stationing of the deadly weapons 90 miles from their shores? And surely the Soviet leaders would not have been so foolhardily selfless as to expose the USSR to nuclear obliteration just to protect Castro? Indeed, we did recently learn that, at the very height of the crisis, Moscow ordered the Soviet commander on the island not to use his nuclear weapons in the case of a U.S. invasion.

Plainly, then, the Soviet nuclear missiles were placed in Cuba to serve as a bargaining chip to be removed for an American concession on an issue that really mattered to the Soviets. What might that issue have been? The evidence is, of necessity, circumstantial. But the weight of it suggests that the Soviets were actually concerned with a trouble spot much closer to home: Germany.

Prior to the Cuban crisis, the besetting concern of both U.S. and Soviet governments was the second Berlin crisis. It began in November 1958 with a Soviet ultimatum to the Western powers. Unless the long-postponed German peace treaty were concluded *within six months*, Moscow would sign a separate pact with its East German satellite. The latter would then have full control of access to West Berlin; that is, the USSR, through East Germany, would institute a second blockade of West Berlin.

Of course, the Soviet proposals for a treaty included three items that Moscow knew were unacceptable to the West: formal recognition of East Germany; the withdrawal of West Germany from NATO; and West Berlin's conversion into a "free city," devoid of either links to the Bonn Republic or a Western military presence. What, then, was the Kremlin's real objective? It was not, as many Western governments then believed, to push the West out of West Berlin—though of course the Soviets would have been delighted to receive such a gift. Rather, the Soviets saw West Berlin as the most exposed nerve of Western defenses in Europe, and, by occasionally pressing it, the Kremlin hoped to exact other concessions. In 1948, the goal was to block the unification of the Western zones of occupation, leading to the creation of the Bonn Republic. And, in 1958, the Soviets' apprehensions centered on what was then the real possibility that West Germany, as part of NATO, would be given nuclear weapons.

This prospect was deeply alarming to the Soviet Union, even more frightening than a nuclear-armed United States. For all of the Soviets' rhetoric about the American imperialists, they knew that the U.S. had not resorted to the ultimate weapon when it enjoyed a nuclear monopoly prior to 1949 or even when faced with possible defeat in Korea. But such weapons in the hands of German "revanchists"—who, Moscow believed, still ached for eastern lands they lost in the cruel Hitler-Stalin war—well, that would be a clear and immediate danger to the Soviet bloc.

Moscow never revealed its true fears to the West, of course, so as not to weaken its bargaining position. It was only when trying to get Communist China to give up its nuclear ambitions that the Soviets hinted at what was really behind the Berlin crisis. As their formal communication to Beijing stated, the USSR could not "present nuclear weapons to China with one hand and struggle with the other against the U.S. giving them to Western Germany."

The second Berlin crisis dragged on for four years. The U.S. and, albeit less firmly, Great Britain refused to recognize East Germany. And then Cuba's accession to the Communist bloc, coupled with U.S. discomfiture over the Bay of Pigs, inspired a belief in the Kremlin that Cuba offered a better way to secure the neutralization of West Germany than a blockade of West Berlin.

Castro agreed to the placing of the weapons in Cuba in June 1962. Publicly, the Soviets kept up the drumbeat over Berlin. Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko informed Kennedy on October 18 that Khrushchev would be coming to New York in November to address the U.N.; the German peace issue had to be settled then, or else. But once it was done there would remain no major problems between East and West. In all likelihood, the Kremlin scenario called for Khrushchev to reveal in November the presence of the missiles in Cuba. The shock produced in the West would be followed by relief at the Soviet Union's "reasonable" conditions for the weapons' removal: a U.S. pledge not to give West Germany nuclear arms and a German peace treaty.

This end-around play was blocked by the discovery of the sites on October 14 and Kennedy's proclamation of the "quarantine" of Cuba on October 22. It was believed that the world stood on the brink of a nuclear holocaust. But, as we have seen, the Soviet commander in Cuba was told not to fire his nuclear weapons. Castro, to his fury, was left out of the U.S.-Soviet negotiations—more evidence that it was not solicitude for his security that brought the Russian missiles to the island. There was no point now for Khrushchev to visit the U.N. in November; as the Soviets were dismantling their installations, the Berlin crisis simply evaporated. Khrushchev's Cuba



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stratagem was undoubtedly included among those "hare-brained schemes" with which his unsentimental colleagues were to charge him after his ouster in 1964.

Nothing in the entire story entitles us to believe that, as Hersh suggests, Khrushchev would have pulled the missiles from Cuba had Kennedy warned him in private that the U.S. knew about his ploy. The president had to assume that pleading with Khrushchev would have signaled that America was susceptible to nuclear blackmail. And that would have only encouraged Khrushchev to raise the stakes, perhaps by instituting a blockade of West Berlin and/or by threatening to place the missiles directly in Castro's hands. In view of the Soviets' deviousness and previous duplicity, no other conclusion seemed logical. Hersh cannot criticize Kennedy both for being reckless in proclaiming the quarantine and for being craven in making a compromise. To Kennedy, the risk in not reacting boldly to the Soviet missile gambit had to appear greater than its possible consequences. He was right. And the secret concession on Turkey was a reasonable price to pay for the Soviets' acknowledgment of defeat.

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**The media ♥ Princeton basketball.**

# HYPE DREAMS

*By David Plotz*

Princeton, an institution long dedicated to the advancement of above-average white guys, has produced five more specimens this winter. As college basketball's annual 64-team championship tournament approaches, the Princeton squad is the most talked-about entrant in the field. The Tigers have won 26 of their 27 games by playing an archaic, unselfish style of basketball. Their starting five are regular-sized student athletes who pay tuition and write their own term papers—even senior theses! Jaundiced sportswriters and buoyant fans alike are downright dewy over Princeton. This, they say, is basketball The Way It Ought To Be.

*The New York Times Magazine* extols the Tigers as "the last amateurs." They are "a throwback to a bygone era" (*The Dallas Morning News*); the antidote to this "era of me first, I want it now" (*Sports Illustrated*). "You could go to 127 NBA games and never see basketball played as wondrously," gushes *Times* sports columnist Ira Berkow. Princeton basketball is "the carefully rehearsed syncopation and counterpoint of a symphony orchestra." Even George Will, the high priest of socio-athletic pontification, has spoken: "This team might be a leading indicator of cultural improvement, advancing virtues important in society and decreasingly apparent in sports."

Talk about March Madness! Baby-boomer nostalgia, which has insinuated itself into every other corner of American culture, has now penetrated college basketball, too. Ah, Princeton: Remember the good old days of *real* student athletes?

Make no mistake, Princeton has a fine basketball program—for an Ivy League school. During the mid '60s, Coach Butch van Breda Kolff's Tigers, led by Bill Bradley, made it to the Final Four. Under Coach Pete Carril, Princeton dominated the Ivies and repeatedly scared powerhouse teams in the first round of the NCAA tournament. In 1996, the Tigers even knocked off UCLA, the defending NCAA champion, before losing in the second round to Mississippi State.

Carril's successor, Bill Carmody, has carried on the Carril system (or "the System," as they say). Because Princeton offers no athletic scholarships and will only bend academic admissions standards so far, its recruits are slower, smaller, and weaker than those at major college programs. To compensate, Princeton emphasizes patience and teamwork. The result is an anachronistic style—the analogue to football's old single-wing formation. Carmody's squad fluidly and precisely executes backdoor cuts, bounce passes, and three-point jump shots. The five starters are all seniors and juniors—no one left early to go pro—and they play wonderfully together.

But does that really make Princeton the eighth-best squad in the country, as the *USA Today* coaches' poll would have it? Princeton went undefeated in the Ivy League—but you and four guys from the local YMCA could probably go undefeated against the likes of Brown and Dartmouth. Princeton mattressed its schedule with Monmouth, Manhattan, and the College of New Jersey. This is not all Princeton's fault: stronger teams are afraid to schedule them, for fear of an embarrassing upset. And Princeton did beat Wake Forest, Texas, as well as North Carolina State. But all three are having off years, and Princeton lost to the only top-25 team it played, North Carolina. (Yes, it was a close road game against a team then ranked number two in the nation. But it was a loss nonetheless.) According to the Sagarin Ratings, which ranks teams on strength of schedule as well as record, Princeton is only the eighteenth best team in America. According to the similar RPI index, Princeton should rank thirtieth. Even Princeton's own starting center, Steve Goodrich, says the team is overranked.

Hype crashes into reality in next week's tournament. Thanks to its inflated rank, Princeton will be seeded high, which means its early competition should be easier than usual. But don't expect the Tigers to go far. Sports pundit and loyal Princeton grad Frank Deford gave me 20 minutes of poetry about the wonders of the Princeton squad before conceding that they'll likely lose in the first round.

So what explains the outpouring of media affection for Old Nassau? Underdog status, for one thing. Disgust with the commercialization of college ball and the corruption



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of academics plays a role, too, as does a veiled—if relatively innocuous—form of racialism. The vast majority of Princeton players over the years have been white; that's true again this year. Would there be four national telecasts, newspaper features in far-flung cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, and a George Will column if Princeton, like many big-time college programs, started five black players? "There is some element of racism here," Deford concedes. "Not a bad racism. There are just not that many white guys to root for [in basketball], and everyone wants to root for their own kind."

Which brings us to the most important and most irksome reason for Princeton hoopla: romanticism. The biggest boosters are middle-aged men who grew up watching the '60s Celtics and the '70s Knicks—Bradley's team. For these wistful fans, basketball is about self-abnegation: the individual must be suppressed for the good of the whole. "All guys in their forties and fifties can identify with the way Princeton plays," says the *Times*'s Berkow. "The way they see the floor. The way they pass. Their unselfishness. To me, it's beautiful."

Modern basketball, in this worldview, is a corruption, a game of self-glorification and hotdogging, an endless quest for the sneaker contract. The average NCAA player could never make it as a Princeton player, the argument goes, because the Tiger ethos would ruin his stats and, thus, his shot at the NBA. It's no surprise that George Will was drawn to the Tigers. Romanticism about Princeton basketball is related to conservative claims about society generally: self-indulgence has supplanted discipline, self-sacrifice, and teamwork.

But it's not morality that separates Princeton from other teams. It's talent. Other colleges don't play Princeton-style ball because, well, it wouldn't make any sense. North Carolina and Duke and Arizona and a dozen other teams also play hellacious defense and run complex, even elegant, offenses. Sure, they play a less selfless style—insofar as that means building the offense around one or two stars—but to criticize them for that is like chastising the Seattle Mariners for having Ken Griffey Jr. bat cleanup. These teams have guards who can beat anyone to the hoop, forwards who can jump out of the gym, centers who can overpower their defenders. Why should they pass the ball seven times around the key?

Anyway, for those of us raised on Jordan and Pippen rather than Cousy and Bradley, Princeton basketball is *not* the way the game was meant to be played. The good old days of bounce passes and backdoor plays were also the dull old days of no alley-oops, no drives to the basket, and no dunks. Today, basketball is faster, more physical, and more spectacular than ever. That's why fans are turning out in record numbers, why basketball is supplanting soccer as the world's favorite sport, and why Michael Jordan is the world's most popular athlete. Princeton prides itself on having dunked only ten times this season. What's so great about that?

DAVID PLOTZ is a senior writer for *Slate*.

**A humane post-Saddam scenario.**

# IRAQRACY

*By Max Singer and David Wurmser*

Last week, the Senate held hearings on whether and how the United States could get rid of Saddam Hussein. There was no disagreement over whether this goal was desirable and plenty of debate over how it could be accomplished. But, as usual, no one talked about a role for the Iraqi people. The American policymakers ignored the Iraqis because of two beliefs carried too far. The first is that Saddam is now able to suppress his people completely. The second is that *only* the U.S. has the power to determine what happens in Iraq.

Both beliefs have some basis in truth. But this does not mean that the only way to remove Saddam is for the U.S. to do so itself. If the U.S. sends the message that it is not willing to accept the indefinite continuation of Saddam's regime, the Iraqi people may well have the ability not only to overthrow Saddam without direct U.S. intervention, but to replace his regime with a democratic system. Indeed, crazy though it may sound, there is a form of democracy that is both compatible with the political realities in Iraq and the most effective basis around which the Iraqi opposition could be organized.

To be sure, Iraq is not the most obvious candidate for the democratic club. Like the rest of its Arab neighbors, Iraq has never known democracy, so it's hard to imagine that a democratic group could prevail in the bitter power struggle required to oust Saddam. Iraq is composed of a multiplicity of different communities—various Kurdish groups, Sunni clans, Shiite groups, and many other small minorities. So, even if democracy were somehow established, it's quite possible that this would only open a Pandora's box. Once unleashed, there's no telling what havoc long-suppressed groups might wreak: A strong Shia voice in Iraq might open the door for Iranian intervention. Secessionist movements could even split Iraq into separate Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia areas—creating major headaches for Turkey, Syria, and Iran. In short, an attempt to establish democracy in Iraq could jeopardize the stability of the entire region.

This is the longstanding conventional wisdom of U.S. policymakers and the reason a secular dictator with a firm handle on Iraq's many communities has always looked safe to them. And that is why the U.S. chose not to support the effort of the Iraqi National Congress to produce a national uprising against Saddam's regime. An umbrella organization with an elected leadership representing all the popular anti-Saddam factions and ethnic



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groups, the INC was formed after the Gulf war as both an insurgent group and the nucleus of an intended provisional government for Iraq. Initially, the U.S. intended for the INC to be a bit player in a broader effort to incite Saddam's inner circle to oust him in a coup. And the INC has had some significant successes. During the period it was receiving U.S. assistance, INC troops moved with impunity from bases in northern Iraq into territory under Saddam's control, absorbing thousands of Iraqi soldiers—many of whom defected as intact units—along the way. But, once the U.S. decided that the INC's success might prove threatening enough to the Iraqi military regime to make potential coup plotters rally around Saddam, it withdrew its support for the INC and allowed Saddam's tank force to invade the formerly "safe" zone of northern Iraq. Having been prevented by the United States from obtaining anti-tank weapons, INC forces were overcome.

The United States's decision to back an internal coup instead of a popular uprising in the form of the INC turned out to be a major mistake. Saddam is far more adept at surviving plots than we could ever be at arranging them, and we grossly underestimated the potential of an INC insurgency. What U.S. policymakers failed (and still fail) to realize is that, far from being impractical, the variant of democracy that the INC was proposing would be deeply rooted in traditional Iraqi political structures. Despite their number, Iraq's many communities have a long history of peaceful coexistence—albeit not by choice. During the long rule by outside empires, first the Ottomans, then the British, each community was allowed to represent and mostly govern itself. And no group was ever allowed to predominate over the others.

Of course, when Iraq became independent, peaceful coexistence was made much more difficult by the entry of such new elements as a large army, the Baath Party and its ideology, and government control of oil wealth—which enabled Saddam to gain total dominance for his Tikriti clan and the Sunni Arabs of central Iraq. But the traditional communities of Iraq still survive: they are the "natural" underlying powers in Iraq. And what most Iraqis would like to see is a return to the traditional balance of power among relatively autonomous communities.

To be sure, the imperial power that guaranteed that balance is gone forever. It is, however, possible to imagine an effective replacement: a limited national government, run democratically, that could serve as an umbrella over the traditional communities, protecting them from one another. Because they sorely need this protection, the communities would have a strong incentive to support such a system. In other words, the very multiplicity of communities that causes U.S. policymakers to doubt the viability of democracy in Iraq could provide the foundation for its success. This limited national government is, in a nutshell, the form of democracy that we should be helping to establish in Iraq by letting the Arab world know that the U.S. has become irrevocably opposed to Saddam's regime and looks with favor on efforts by the Iraqi people to install a different government.

The new national government would directly influence the lives of Iraqis as little as possible, leaving nearly all practical power in the hands of the communities with which most people identify. The communities' official power would be some combination of formal authority and informal political understandings within the national government. Naturally, the national government would still control foreign policy and international trade, provide a national currency and a system of commercial law and courts, and control enough military force to prevent any one community from dominating the rest. The national government would also protect minorities and guarantee a degree of civil liberty.

Inevitably, such a central government would create pressure for internal democracy within the constituent communities—even if it made no explicit effort to do so. But it would probably be a mistake for the central government to pursue this goal actively until it had a few years under its belt.

It is, of course, uncertain whether the Iraqis could make democracy work even in such a limited way. Would the power-holders be willing and able to set up such a limited democratic government as a way of avoiding conflict among themselves? And, if they did agree to try it, would it succeed?

There is virtually no chance that such a complicated and foreign idea could be sold to the leader of an effective Iraqi insurgency group—certainly not by the U.S. government. But it happens that Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the INC, which is already the most effective organization trying to overthrow and replace Saddam's regime, invented this idea for himself. The INC platform calls for installing a decentralized democratic government. Chalabi is American-educated and has a deep understanding of and commitment to democracy. Though a Shiite, he is more a part of the traditional Baghdadi elite than of the Shiite structures in southern Iraq. (The Shia have their own representatives in the INC.) Chalabi knows that he would not last long as a national leader if he represented a Shia effort to dominate the other communities. And, as leader of the INC, Chalabi has worked to demonstrate and to teach democratic ways, even while leading a fighting insurgency.

If the INC succeeds in overthrowing Saddam by using its democratic platform to avoid destructive divisions among the various groups that will need to join forces, the community leaders can be led to fulfill their pledge to take a chance on establishing a democratic national government that allows them to live together without fear that one will try to dominate the others. Furthermore, Chalabi can point out to them that each group has idealistic young people in its community who believe in democracy, law, and merit systems. He can say: "You can get them out of your hair by letting them operate a limited national government on a modern democratic basis with the modern idealist democrats from the other communities."



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If Chalabi, or someone else, succeeded in establishing such a limited national democratic government in Iraq, would it survive? One reason to think it might is that the division of politics into national and community arenas would make it possible for the small democratic elements in each community—no one of which is strong enough to control its community, or even protect itself—to have a common arena where they can work together and support one another. Democratic Kurds, democratic Shiites, and democratic Sunnis can reinforce one another in the national arena, even though in the Kurdish arena, for example, no Sunni or Shiite could provide effective political help to the democratic Kurds.

While we need to be realistic about the strength of the resistance to democracy that traditional attitudes and community forces create in many cultures, we should also not underestimate the appeal of democracy. In every society around the world, there are people who admire it and would like to help bring it to their country. Most will recognize that it may be too soon and adjust their actions accordingly. But, wherever a leader or a strategy offers reasonable hope for some kind of democracy, there will be eager recruits.

Two kinds of failure are possible. First, the national government could degenerate into an authoritarian regime that tries to suppress the communities. Second, the national government could be so weak that it fails to prevent one of the communities from seizing power. The national government might even be so divided, ineffective, and incompetent that it can't fulfill essential functions, but this is unlikely if the national government takes a modest view of its job.

Ultimately, it is impossible to predict whether an Iraqi democracy would succeed. It would probably require a great leader, but even great leaders succumb to ego and ambition. South Africa found the rare leader it needed in Nelson Mandela. Maybe Chalabi can perform a similar service for his country.

In short, America's best hope in Iraq is probably a national insurgency against Saddam by the INC. Though the INC's plan may fail, it is not foolish or based on ignorance of the fundamental realities of Iraq's culture and political system. And, if Chalabi's approach to combining modern democratic and traditional Middle Eastern political styles succeeds, it will offer an alternative path for much of the Arab world. The struggle with fundamentalism does not have to be a winner-take-all fight for control of an all-powerful state. Instead, there might be a Middle East in which each society works out its own evolving accommodation among various secular, religious, and ethnic communities—under the auspices of national regimes based on modern concepts of limited government and the rule of law, with no community imposing itself on the others.

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**The dangerous backlash against vaccination.**

# INJECTION REJECTION

*By Arthur Allen*

President Clinton's ongoing initiative to immunize every American child against infectious disease seems like the kind of safe-as-milk, baby-step health policy that everyone should love. The ultimate motherhood issue. But Clinton, presumably, didn't consult Len Horowitz. A former dentist-turned-"healthcare motivational speaker," Horowitz is carving out a new niche in the history of the paranoid style in American politics. His message: The AIDS and Ebola epidemics resulted from the contamination—possibly intentional—of common vaccines by the military-medico-industrial complex. The Rockefeller Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control, famed AIDS researcher Dr. Robert Gallo, and—yes—Henry Kissinger all figure in Horowitz's gallery of germ-warfare conspirators. Horowitz, who apparently honed his expertise on such matters by drilling teeth in Gloucester, Massachusetts, has urged the government to stop immunizing children until independent researchers can determine if the shots are spreading disease. He charges up to $3,500 to share his theories with holistic-medicine groups, survivalist conventions, and other pockets of suspiciousness. During the past couple of years, he has rarely lacked for speaking engagements.

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The pronouncements of Len Horowitz might safely be filed away next to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the Roswell alien snapshots were it not for the fact that they are reaching an audience that has few antibodies to quackery. Most distressing to the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration, and to public health experts more generally, Horowitz and Louis Farrakhan have found each other.

According to a Nation of Islam official, Farrakhan heard Horowitz last year on a talk-radio program in Phoenix and invited him to dinner. A joint news release followed from Horowitz and Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad, Farrakhan's "minister of health and human services," calling for a moratorium on the immunization of Nation of Islam children. (Muhammad was already notorious in public health circles for having race-baited the National Institutes of Health into conducting a clinical study of Kemron, a drug he has dispensed to AIDS patients at his D.C. clinic. The study, begun in 1996, quickly closed for lack of patients.) Alarmed that already underimmunized ghetto populations were about to get goaded into forgoing vaccinations altogether, the National Medical Association—a mainstream professional group for black physicians—hastily arranged for public health officials to meet with Muhammad at a Washington hotel last summer. Afterward, Muhammad agreed to shelve the moratorium, at least temporarily. Solicitous CDC and FDA officials later accepted his invitation to debate Horowitz in a panel discussion at the Nation of Islam's annual Savior's Day festival on February 20 in Chicago.

It appears unlikely that the Nation of Islam will truly dispense with immunizations, but, as it happens, Horowitz and Muhammad are merely the most baroque figures in a widespread and growing anti-vaccination movement. Its adherents range from clueless paranoids to parents and physicians with more or less genuine concerns about the safety of vaccinations and more or less solid scientific evidence to back them up. The movement poses a counterweight to what is arguably among the most encouraging developments in medicine: a generation of new vaccines for everything from AIDS and dengue fever to common childhood ear and gut infections.

For years, vaccination has been a basic tenet of public health and one of its unqualified successes. The elimination of polio and diphtheria along with the decline of such potential killers as measles, mumps, whooping cough, and rubella are well-documented triumphs. A less known and more recent success story is that of the HIB vaccine, which inoculates children against the Haemophilus influenza type B bacteria, the main cause of bacterial meningitis. In 1984, the year before HIB was introduced, the disease struck about 20,000 Americans, mostly children, killing about 1,000 and causing brain damage or permanent hearing loss in a few thousand others. In 1997, only 150 cases of bacterial meningitis were reported.

Notwithstanding its achievements, vaccination is a counterintuitive biological process. Dead or weakened forms of a fearsome microorganism are injected into a healthy person, provoking an immune response—and often a few symptoms of the disease in question. The immune system's antibodies in turn protect the inoculated person from future attack from the "wild" forms of the germ. Since Edward Jenner smeared his first patient with cowpox to shield him from the more dangerous smallpox germs in 1796, immunization has inspired anxiety. The turn-of-the-century American anti-vaccinationist movement spread across the country and set off riots in Milwaukee. The "state quackery" of "compulsory blood poisoning" is an "abomination against God and human nature itself, and every intelligent, conscientious person regards it accordingly," a physiology professor wrote in a 1902 edition of *The Vaccination Inquirer*, the mouthpiece of the anti-vaccination movement (which was funded by a mail-order patent medicine company in Battle Creek, Michigan).

For the early anti-vaccinationists, immunization was a crime against hygiene and a get-rich scheme for doctors. But they didn't see it, exactly, as a political issue. Today, in contrast, some of the loudest opponents draw their support and arguments from left-meets-right anti-governmentalism. Horowitz, for example, has appeared at survivalist conventions cheek-by-jowl with right-wing militiamen and as a guest on Gary Null's "Natural Living," a holistic health program that airs several times a week on left-wing Pacifica radio stations in Washington and New York.

Null himself is a florid example of the new conspiracy thinking about public health. In a voice that suggests Mister Rogers with a hangover, Null warns that fluoridation kills (the John Birch Society made similar claims during the early 1960s) and denies that HIV causes AIDS. He hosts everyone from right-wing media critic Reed Irvine to JFK assassination obsessive Robert Morningstar—with a lot of chiropractors in between. Anti-vaccination guests have included Viera Scheibner, a shrill Australian who insists that vaccines suppress immunity. (Scheibner obfuscated so wildly during a speaking tour of Australia last year that *The Skeptic* magazine honored her with its annual Bent Spoon Award for Australia's biggest charlatan.) One Null show that aired last December 17 on WPFW in Washington featured a Brooklyn "researcher" named Curtis Cost, who shared the following pearls of wisdom: "If you take the measles vaccine, you have a sixty, sixty-five percent chance of getting measles. If you take polio vaccine, you have a roughly eighty, eighty-seven percent chance you will get polio."

This is, of course, pure rubbish. Nevertheless, if you follow the foolishness to its source, you find that there are some real problems with vaccines.

In a sense, mass childhood immunization has become a victim of its own success. Infant mortality rates in the U.S. are a quarter of what they were in 1950. The average child's of risk contracting polio, measles, or diphtheria is vanishingly low. No one questioned whether Normandy had been worth it after Hitler was crushed.



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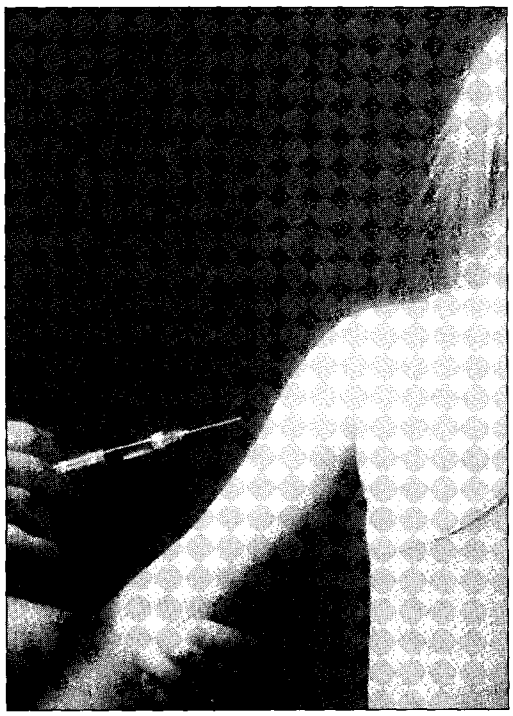
But, the more the killer germs of the century (with the exception of HIV) fade from memory, the more the public's attention focuses on the adverse reactions vaccines themselves inevitably, if only occasionally, cause.

Take the polio scourge. "Polio was such a frightening specter that a few people's bad reactions to the vaccine simply didn't register," says Dr. Edgar Marcuse, chair of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee. "But the diseases that terrified our grandparents are no longer part of anyone's experience." While "wild" polio struck 21,269 people in 1952, it has not been reported in the United States since 1979. Since then, however, oral polio vaccines have given about 200 people the crippling disease. While that's awful enough if one of the 200 happens to be your child, it's still just one in 2.4 million doses—pretty good odds by any measure.

Another illustrative case study is the controversy over the whole-cell pertussis vaccine—the P in the DPT shot. In 1982, a group of parents who were convinced that the vaccine had harmed their children began organizing to press the government to do something about it. Barbara Loe Fisher is the president of the group, the National Vaccine Information Center, which is run out of a second-story office in a strip mall in suburban Vienna, Virginia. Fisher's oldest child, now 20, suffered a seizure and became learning-disabled after his fourth DPT shot in 1979. "The afternoon after the shot I went up to his room, and he was sitting in his little chair, staring straight ahead," she says in an interview. "I held him, and he pitched forward, with his eyes rolling around in his head. Later that night he had terrible diarrhea and then he slept, and I couldn't wake him. He's never been the same."



To be sure, Fisher's group has had at least some salutary impact: its pressure helped spur development of the even safer acellular pertussis vaccine, which became widely available last year. And, in 1986, after thousands of lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers threatened the supply of cheap vaccines, Fisher's group, the vaccine industry, and the CDC pushed Congress to pass the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act. That act created a no-fault claims court, funded by a levy on vaccines, where the parents of sickened or dead children could collect compensation.

The vaccine court has handed out cash to more than 2,600 people whose children died or were seriously injured after vaccination—with DPT, in a large majority of the cases. Yet, while that number must be read as a tacit admission that vaccines carry some risk, neither it nor the 63,000 vaccine reactions (including 1,094 deaths) recorded in the past seven years by an FDA–CDC vaccine injury reporting system are necessarily proof of widespread vaccine failures. As CDC officials explain it, the reactions the system records are rarely distinctive enough for doctors to be sure a particular vaccine caused them. Babies suffer terrible illnesses, and since babies are often vaccinated it is likely that illness will occur not long after some immunization or another. In a 1994 report on vaccine safety, the Institute of Medicine reported that "the vast majority of deaths reported ... are temporally but not causally related to vaccination." A later report amended that finding to acknowledge that the whole-cell pertussis vaccine could lead to permanent brain damage, but the bottom line, as one institute official puts it, remains that "a lot of bad things happen to small children that we don't understand."

The problem, in any event, is not the cases for which the government implicitly accepts responsibility, but the thousands—even millions—more that advocates like Fisher claim go unrecorded. "Kids get shots, something happens to them, and nobody makes the connection," says Fisher. "Why can't we do a better job of admitting we've got a problem here? Why can't they do the science to figure out what's going on?" Her group has trumpeted some recent studies that suggest vaccination may trigger autoimmune problems, in which the body attacks itself, and may be responsible for the increased incidence of diseases like asthma and diabetes and, for that matter, Gulf war syndrome. "You have to ask whether we're simply trading childhood sickness for chronic diseases," Fisher says.

This is a fascinating thought—and a rather disturbing one, particularly since it's so easy to disseminate. Although few scientists share it, there have been enough widely disparate studies on vaccine safety over the years that anybody—well, anyone with computer access to MEDLINE—can document anything he or she wants to say on his or her personal website, with all the sites hyperlinking back and forth in a frenetic group grope. Vaccine anxiety is the perfect symptom of what British medical writer Paul Hodgkin describes as postmodern medicine. "Utterly unquestioned biological givens are disintegrating all around us: the stability of the climate, the immutability of species ... the unchangeable genetic makeup of one's unborn children," Hodgkin wrote recently in the *British Medical Journal*. With certainties fading, it is easy for people who feel medically vulnerable to build seductive hints and fragments into a coherent, if warped, belief system. "Trust is fragile," says Regina Rabinovich, chief of clinical studies in microbiology at the National



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Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, "and in science we're not very good at proving the negative."

In 1994, Heather Whitestone became the first Miss America with a disability. She went deaf at the age of only 18 months, the initial news reports said, after suffering an adverse reaction to a DPT shot. In fact, as Whitestone's pediatrician later confirmed, it was not DPT but a bout of bacterial meningitis—the disease now nearly eliminated by the HIB vaccine—that cost Whitestone her hearing. The Whitestone case helped spur public health officials to begin an initiative last month to improve vaccine-safety information. They chose to run the project under the auspices of the Infectious Disease Society of America rather than the federal CDC. "There's too much anti-government, anti-industry sentiment out there," says one physician involved in the effort.

One of the major concerns of the project is the relatively low vaccination rate among poor blacks. In 1996, the CDC's National Immunization Survey found only 63 and 65 percent compliance with a recommended vaccination regimen for children in majority-black Newark and Detroit, respectively, compared to the U.S. average of 79 percent and the high of 88 percent in the state of Connecticut. Since vaccinations can be had for free, the major reasons for these low rates are clearly social—family disorganization and high dropout rates on the one hand, suspicion of the government on the other.

Meanwhile, Barbara Loe Fisher recently embarked on a new crusade to win parents the federally guaranteed right to enroll their children in school without vaccinations if they don't believe in them. "It is not in the best interest of the citizens of this free society, or of public health officials in positions of authority, to use the heel of the boot of the state to crush all dissent to mandatory vaccination laws," she said in a recent speech. Fisher may not be Horowitz, but her position on mandatory vaccination worries public health officials—for good reason.

About half of one percent of all parents in the United States currently take advantage of religious exemptions from immunization, permitted in all states except for Mississippi and West Virginia, or of variously defined philosophical exemptions, which are allowed in 17 states. While public health officials generally see families who exempt their children as free-riders enjoying "herd immunity" without participating in the risk, they're usually willing to grant exemptions to any family that whines insistently enough, if only because a crackdown could provoke a more serious backlash. But with Fisher and others stirring up more support, public health officials worry that the anti-vaccination movement will gain footholds in the socially isolated groups that have distorted views of reality—and are, already, at greater risk of disease. Farrakhan's dalliance with Horowitz, for example, enraged many black physicians because they fear the target population's reliance on urban legends. "It's one thing to talk about AIDS as genocide and a whole different thing to fan the flames of mistrust and fear about immunizations," says Stephen Thomas, director of the Institute for Minority Health Research at Emory University's school of public health. "We know [vaccines] save lives."

There's no evidence that current exemptions are causing major disease outbreaks in the United States—at least for now. But infectious diseases have a way of finding the chinks in a society's immunological armor. In the January 31 issue of *The Lancet*, epidemiologists led by Eugene Gangarosa of Emory University charted the return of whooping cough after a decline of DPT shots in countries that had vaccination scares during the late 1970s. In Japan, after the deaths of two children who had gotten DPT shots in 1974, the percentage of school-age children receiving the pertussis vaccine fell from 80 percent to ten percent. Whooping cough, which had nearly disappeared, returned with a vengeance: in 1979, there were 13,000 cases and 41 deaths. Similar outbreaks followed declining vaccine coverage in Australia, Britain, and Sweden. The most crushing evidence of the continued need for vaccines comes from Russia, where crumbling public health services and Rasputin-like anti-vaccinationists have led to a collapse of immunizations in many areas and an explosion of long-dormant infectious diseases. In 1995, to cite the most tragic statistic, 1,700 Russians died of diphtheria, a disease of the 1920s.

In the United States, officials have gotten some sense of the opportunism of infectious diseases by studying small outbreaks. Of the 508 measles cases reported in 1996, 107 occurred in and around the town of St. George, Utah. In a fascinating study of that outbreak, CDC epidemiologists were able to demonstrate just how risky a few unvaccinated children could be. The St. George area has a high rate of schoolchildren with religious and philosophical exemptions from vaccination. Of the 107 measles cases, 48 were in exempted, unvaccinated children who played the key role in spreading the disease. Measles takes two weeks to incubate, so officials were able to track six successive generations of the outbreak. According to Daniel Salmon, a fellow at the CDC, two of the three children in the first generation were unvaccinated. The measles vaccine is thought to be 95 percent effective, which accounts for the 59 vaccinated children who contracted the disease. As the outbreak slowly spread through successive generations, exposing more and more children, the germs eventually found the small percentage of kids whose vaccinations had failed.

Whooping cough has increased slightly in the United States since Fisher's movement got underway. No one has linked the two, but, as it happens, no one is more aware of the risks than Fisher herself. After her son's episode with the DPT shot, Fisher decided not to vaccinate her two younger children. And, in a peculiarly bitter twist of fate, of the several thousand U.S. cases of pertussis in 1992, two were Fisher's children. "I watched as my five-year-old daughter's face turned white," she recalled in a recent speech. "Her lips turned blue, and her eyes bulged out of her head during a paroxysm of whooping cough that I thought would take her life." •



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# BOOKS & The Arts

## *Stanley Kauffmann on Films*

### Cruelties

John Sayles is having a career. Whatever one's response to this Sayles film or that as they appear, he pushes on, writing and directing what interests him. He also writes films for other people, acts, publishes novels and short stories, and writes plays. In other countries this dossier would not be startling: here it is almost unique. Woody Allen is comparable, but Allen, essentially, is show biz on a roll. Sayles, never as keen as Allen at his best and rarely comic, has deeper stirrings and wider range—urban troubles, Irish myth, Texas border problems, labor history, and more.

Now Sayles extends further, with a film in Spanish. He knows the language, but wrote the screenplay in English, then translated it with help—because he wanted to use Latino actors in this Latino story. He not only directed, he edited **Men with Guns** (Sony Pictures Classics), which is set in Central America. Except for two American tourists, all the cast speak either Spanish or one of several Indian languages. Sayles's choices were canny, his empathy was strong: the performance level is higher than in any Sayles film I remember.

The country is not called Guatemala, but that's a technicality. It's a place where people in the countryside are trapped between revolutionary guerrillas and the army. The guerrillas kill farmers and villagers for helping the army, then the army simply reverses the procedure.

Sayles has found an adroit means to explore this cruel dilemma. A physician in the capital city, Dr. Fuentes, approaching retirement, lately widowed, faced with a diminishing life, decides to do some visiting. Years earlier he had been the teacher of a group of young doctors who then went out to practice in remote villages. Dr. Fuentes decides to call on them. He leaves his modern office in a modern city and drives into what, he sees, is another world.

In the picture's first scene Dr. Fuentes is examining a patient who, when dressed, is revealed as a general and who, in the friendliest way, tells Dr. Fuentes that he has lived a sheltered life in a horrible world. In every place that the doctor then visits he finds this statement substantiated: each village has been either ravaged or razed, either by guerrillas or army, the population decimated. In every place the local doctor has been killed by one force or the other for helping the enemy.

Along the way Dr. Fuentes acquires companions, some of them invited. A boy of ten or so, homeless, sly with knowledges of survival, serves as guide. An army deserter robs the doctor, then, because of a wound, tags along. A priest who has defrocked himself because of his defection in duty floats with them principally because he doesn't care what he does or where he goes. And a girl who has been raped and traumatized joins the group.

The doctor's expedition, because of the texture of character and performance, is gripping. But Sayles, who has often shown a weakness for arrant symbolism, injures his film with its closing sequence. The last village that the doctor visits, hoping to find a surviving student of his, is called Circle of Heaven, is on a mountain top, and is very difficult to reach. What happens there fulfills Sayles's artifice but shortchanges the gravity of the political picture that has led there.

Sayles credits the American-Guatemalan novelist, Francisco Goldman, with assistance, but, as the above indicates, the atmosphere is pure Graham Greene, the Greene of *The Power and the Glory* and *The Comedians*. This atmosphere is nurtured by the actors. Federico Luppi, an Argentinian actor of distinction and fine presence, gives Dr. Fuentes dignity without pose, courage without bravado. The boy, Dan Rivera Gonzalez, makes his debut here and is a credit to himself and his director. Damián Delgado, who looks like an Aztec figure, gives the deserter an iniquity so seasoned that he is now almost proud of it. Tania Cruz is affecting as the mute injured girl. But the most memorable performance is by Damián Alcázar as the priest, or ex-priest, whose life is finished except for his existence. Alcázar gives us a man who has gone to hell in every way except physically and is glad that he has been punished.

Sayles the editor works capably, most notably in some delicate transitional passages and in the interweaving of the flashbacks that explain the characters we meet. If only he had resisted his closing lapse into symbolism, his film would have had some symbolic effect.

At any rate, his career moves on. His filmmaking life is being lived.

Nationally speaking, European film history contains some baffling contradic-

### FILMS WORTH SEEING

**Amistad.** *Maligned because a successful Hollywood director dared to tackle a serious subject, this account of an 1839 slave rebellion has integrity of purpose and texture. (Reviewed 12/22/97)* **Boogie Nights.** *The L.A. porno-flick world in the late 1970s. Gritty, but in a multi-stranded, nearly epic way, more than gritty. (11/10/97)* **The Sweet Hereafter.** *Ian Holm is splendid as a lawyer who tries to help a town that lost many of its children in a school-bus accident. Splendid, too, is the entire drama. (12/8/97)* **Wag the Dog.** *Tired of the Lewinsky realities? Turn to fiction that antecedes it. Funnier now, and more unsettling, because of the news. (2/2/98)*—**SK**



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tions. Why do neighboring countries of comparable size, population, and cultural wealth have such different film records? Sweden has one of the oldest and finest film histories; Norway's is negligible. Even more marked is the difference between Hungary and Austria (which once were politically united). In New York there has recently been a grand retrospective of Hungarian film at the Walter Reade. Such a festival of Austrian film is unimaginable.

Which makes a new Austrian film all the more odd. **Funny Games** (Attitude) was written and directed by Michael Haneke, a man in his 50s with large experience in theater, TV, and film. No one could doubt his experience after seeing this picture. It was cast skillfully (the leading couple are bluntly unbeautiful which, in its way, helps credibility). The pacing is careful and, one must say, fruitful: pauses produce effects. What is odd is that a director of Haneke's dexterity and intelligence should have chosen a plot gimmick that is so worn.

*Funny Games* is a horror-thriller which begins with only a hint of trouble, a subtle one. A couple in their late 30s with a son of eight or nine are driving to their country place, and as they drive, they play opera recordings, in which husband and wife challenge each other's ability to recognize singer and work. All is urbane, cultivated. This is before the credits. When the credits come on, the music changes to wild rock, changing back again to opera when the credits are over. Thus we know that wildness is lurking nearby.

They arrive at their luxe lakeside house, and soon they have a visitor, bland and polite. He is then joined by a polite friend of his. Now the family is held prisoner—by two men who know all about their lives, neighbors, telephones, and so on. The two captors don't have robbery as a motive, just thrills. Having planned matters carefully, they are insinuatingly able to have their way.

If only this were the first, or fifteenth, time this gimmick had been used. The first instance I can recall of the bland turning baleful is a 1935 play called *Kind Lady*, which was subsequently filmed twice. A more recent example is Stephen King's *Misery*. Once we recognize the genre into which *Funny Games* fits all too snugly, the chief remaining interest is in looking for any novelty that Haneke may have devised. He does come up with some shallow Pirandello stuff—interplay of fiction and reality. Several times, including the final shot, one of the captors addresses the camera, thus acknowledging our presence; and there is an incident with the remote control of a TV set, in which the film we are watching is reversed for a bit and done over differently, that is quite clever.

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But this reality/fiction idea is mere décor, not central intent. (And Haneke permits some wide gaps in what is supposed to be an airtight plot.) The basic puzzle is why this sophisticated director chose this tired formula. Perhaps it was a holiday from his more serious work. Still, that doesn't make it a holiday for us. And it doesn't much help an overall estimate of Austrian film. •

**Johannes Brahms and the mastery of melancholy.**

# *Why Is Light Given?*

**By Alex Ross**

I.

Morton Feldman, the funniest of composers, liked to tell a story. "Two guys visit Haydn, two journalists from Cologne. They ask him about literary, programmatic pieces, and Haydn says, 'Yeah,' he says, 'I wrote this one piece which was a dialogue between God and a sinner.' Big theme, right? And they say, 'What's the name of that piece?' And Haydn says, 'I forget.'" The moral is: our words and pictures for music never match, but the possibility of meaning lingers, outside the spotlight of verbal association. We can look for programs, we can apply names to abstract pieces, but we have to do it with a smile and a shrug.

Feldman's joke could have been told about Brahms. It could have been told *by* Brahms. Many times, in his letters and in the memoirs of his friends, Brahms did a variation on Feldman's sly little dance with meaning—feint of disclosure, quick step back. Consider a famous letter to Vincenz Lachner, a conductor who had written Brahms in a mixture of wonderment and confusion about the Second Symphony. The work is ostensibly a pastoral one, in the summery key of D, beginning with a horn call from afar and ending with an earthy dance for orchestra. But something darksome works under the surface—low chords in the trombones and tuba, passing dissonances in archaic cadences. Why such "gloomy lugubrious tones" at the outset of a light-filled piece, Lachner wanted to know? Brahms replied:

> The first entrance of the trombones, that's mine. I can't get along without it. I must confess to you that I am a profoundly melancholy man, that black wings flap incessantly above us, and that in my output this symphony is followed—perhaps not entirely by chance—by a little essay on the great "*Warum?*" [the motet "Why Is Light Given to Him That Is in Misery?"]. I will send it to you if you don't know it. It throws the necessary sharp shadows across the lighthearted symphony and perhaps explains those trombones and timpani.

At this point, Vincenz Lachner and all of us reading over his shoulder are thinking, "Aha! The Master is giving away secrets!" The Second Symphony has a subtext, and it is Job's despair, a blasphemous longing for death, quite literally a "dialogue between God and a sinner." Then Brahms laughs out loud: "But I also ask you not to take all this so very seriously or tragically, particularly that passage!" And he goes on to explain that passing dissonance in the closing bars of the movement as a "sensuously beautiful sound" that "comes about as logically as possible—quite of its own accord." In short, it's all a question of technique. Such things as black wings and light in darkness and dialogues with God are sweets thrown to musical children. When we grow up, the music will be sufficient in itself. Brahms extends the joke in a letter to his publisher about that great, dismal motet, "Why Is Light Given to Him That Is in Misery?" and its companion piece, "O Savior, Fling Open the Heavens." He proposed, in the interest of saving space, the following abbreviated advertisement: "Motets by Joh. Br. No. 1. Why? No. 2. Oh!"

*Johannes Brahms: A Biography*
by Jan Swafford
(Knopf, 699 pp., $35)

*Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*
selected and annotated by Styra Avins
*translated by Josef Eisinger and Styra Avins*
(Oxford University Press, 858 pp., $49.95)

*Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms*
by Reinhold Brinkmann
translated by Peter Palmer
(Harvard University Press, 241 pp., $22)

*Brahms: The Four Symphonies*
by Walter Frisch
(Schirmer Books, 226 pp., $35)

But it is not so easy to forget those rustling black wings. They are rather like Dostoevsky's white bear, the one you are supposed to go into a corner and not think about. What is most interesting about this anecdote is that it mirrors a mechanism in the music itself. Not only does Brahms the letter-writer hint at, and then withdraw, meanings in his music; Brahms the composer does the same. Consider the Second Symphony. It begins with a dipping-and-rising three-note figure, D-C-sharp-D, the thematic kernel of the whole piece. The opening paragraph—warm, deliberate, richly scored—establishes the symphony's dominant mood. But the music soon loses momentum: the texture thins out, the strings wend downward, and that hooded Wagnerian quartet of trombones and tuba creeps on stage. The three-note figure sounds bleakly in the woodwinds, the timpani rumbles underneath. Thus Brahms breaks the conventional narrative rhythm of a symphonic movement. He has the tone of a storyteller who launches into his tale—"Once upon a time, in my youth..."—and then immediately falls silent, under the spell of darker, vaguer memories.

Even more remarkable is what happens next, and again in the movement's coda. Having shot a ray of darkness into a world of light, Brahms recovers light without struggle. He shrugs, and resumes. D major comes back, now more firmly anchored in the bass, and the three-note figure blossoms in a fluid, streaming violin line. It is a "fresh beginning," in the words of Reinhold Brinkmann; the music "conceals the unfathomable as the subterranean dimension of a seemingly secure composition...." The subterranean returns periodically; and in the coda it almost takes over, as horn and strings lose themselves in an aching, chromatic extension of the first idea. Then the winds burst in with a new theme. It is a chipper, bouncing ditty, quoting Brahms's own song "*Es liebt sich so lieblich im Lenze*" ("Love is So Lovely in Springtime"). The music is as stupid as the words: the symphony seems to be trying to cheer itself up in front of us, to cast off a nameless sadness. Perhaps this ditty is the tale that Brahms has been meaning to tell all along. But now it's closing time: the spring song whirls away in a fast diminuendo, like a group of revelers vanishing down an empty street. In

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the last bars, the horns come full circle with the sad-happy opening chords. The odd harmonic "twinge" in the ending, the one that pained the ears of Lachner, is produced by an overlap of elements—last chirps of the winds (a "plagal" cadence from G minor to D) brushing against D major in the horns. That dissonance indicates a simultaneity of emotional states. The shading of the scene is as fine as anything in Proust.

One could go on. The emotional world of Brahms is as infinite as it is intimate. His honesty becomes at times uncomfortable: he seems to exhibit, in cruel detail, his own hour-by-hour struggle to stave off paralyzing melancholy. I say seems, because an uncertainty still lingers. What is Brahms's precise point of regard in the scene that I have described? Is he the mournful one who is left behind? Or is he one of the laughing revelers who dance away? Are we the lonely ones, we listeners in the dark? Is the apparent sorrow of Brahms our invention?

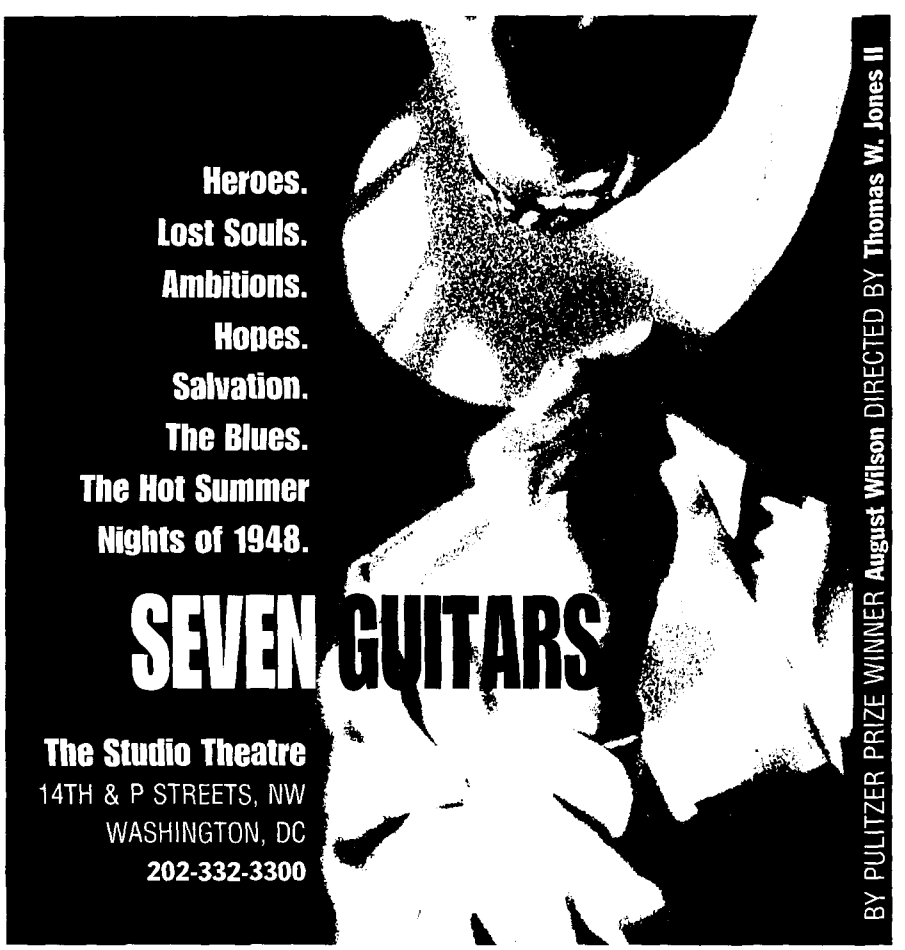
Brahms's ability, in music and in life, to recover joy, to be at ease with himself, places him in a different category from most of the insufferably suffering Romantics. Contrast him, in particular, to Schubert. (At least two elements of the Second Symphony—rumbling standstill after lyric opening; mournful soliloquy for horn—are apparent references to Schubert, to the B-flat Sonata and the Ninth Symphony.) Schubert never gives doubt of the extreme subjectivity of his music. But Brahms is a voice always shifting, always changing. He proves richly unreliable: an immensely sophisticated literary voice in musical guise, perhaps the most sophisticated in history. Brahms will be hard to pin down. And his real self may turn out to be unimportant. Yet the effort is necessary, because it is part of his trance, his game.

## II.

The "real" Brahms: he has been sought everywhere in the century since his death, and his contemporaries found him elusive even when he was standing in the room. Two books have recently arrived to shed varying degrees of light on this Sphinx-like character: Jan Swafford's ambitious, passionate, 700-page biography and Styra Avins's equally hefty collection of correspondence, which contains nearly a whole biography in its exhaustive annotations. Getting a sense of the "real" Brahms from these books requires a certain amount of triangulation. Swafford tries too hard to give Romantic glamour to a basically unexciting life, and Avins is a little too defensive of Brahms as he wished himself to be seen. It requires further effort to move from this bumptious, brittle, ruthlessly controlled personality to the more vulnerable and generous soul of the music. It may be better, in the end, to begin with the music and work backward to the man. This is the approach adopted by Reinhold Brinkmann in his obsessive, revelatory study of the Second Symphony, and by Walter Frisch in his more sober and methodical book on all four symphonies. These four books together—and a handful of new recordings—brought a cluster of illuminations in the composer's centenary year.

The first biographical mystery—and the occasion for the first interesting disparity between Swafford and Avins—is the nature of Brahms's upbringing in Hamburg. Most books, Swafford's included, state that Brahms grew up in a slum; that his father forced him to make money for the family in various unsavory ways, including playing the piano in sailors' taverns and brothels; that he must have been deeply scarred by the squalor of his youth, to the point of "shutting down," in the language of contemporary psychobabble. Avins, taking off from the work of German scholars such as Kurt Hoffmann and Kurt Stephenson, thinks otherwise. She points out that the *Gängeviertel*, where Brahms grew up, became a crowded slum only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In the 1830s, during Brahms's childhood, it was a respectable working-class neighborhood. It would seem that Brahms had a quiet, well-protected childhood; that his parents, though far from wealthy, put all their resources into his musical training; that the circumstances under which he first played piano in public—businessmen's homes, semiprivate concerts—were not unsavory, and in fact quite flattering. Unfortunately, Swafford does not seem to have seen Hoffmann's study and repeats several long-standing errors and myths that it corrects. "Johannes was surrounded by the stink of beer and unwashed sailors and bad food," he guesses. He perpetuates some of the worst habits of Brahms's earliest biographers, who, in Avins's words, "confused lack of money with lack of morals."

Still, we have to wonder where these stories of sleaze and degradation came from. It seems possible that Brahms himself told some version of them, perhaps elaborating on an accident of his youth or on a situation that he observed in passing. He may have looked in a window on his way to a lesson, and later fantasized himself on the other side of it.



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Brahms as a young man had a wild imagination. He steeped himself in E. T. A. Hoffmann's tales and, like Schumann, he used them to invent alternate artistic personalities (in his case, "Young Kreisler," the solitary, half-mad Kapellmeister). Even if the stories of playing piano in sailors' dives and being fondled by prostitutes are the invention of others, they remain interesting. They remind us how much speculation the young Brahms inspired, this beautiful young man with the flowing blond hair. He enjoyed his sense of mystery, and his mysterious innocence allowed him to float farther off the ground.

Brahms was blessed, lucky. His exit from the potentially constricting musical world of Hamburg was almost absurdly easy. Through the minor violinist Remenyi he met the major violinist Joachim, who noticed his talent at once and encouraged him to visit Schumann. In 1853, when he was 20, he set off on a walking tour of the Rhine, wandered into Schumann's home, played some pieces on the piano, and found himself a few weeks later a famous man. After hearing him, Schumann sat down immediately to write an article entitled "New Paths," in which Brahms was hailed as a "young eagle" who would save German music. As Swafford amusingly points out, Schumann had written this kind of prophecy before: Ludwig Schunke and William Sterndale Bennett, among others, had been hailed as godlike youths.

Schumann's slightly premature panegyric made Brahms famous. It also aroused a great deal of skepticism, envy, and outright hostility in various corners of the musical world. He had his failures early on, notably the fiasco of the First Piano Concerto in Leipzig in 1859; and he was never given the full acclaim he desired from his home town. (Vienna, which he first visited in 1862 and made his permanent home in 1871, always seemed, as Swafford writes, a "place of exile.") But Schumann had given him a very considerable opening through which to move, and he was able to devote time to composing that might otherwise have been squandered on workaday performing. That short path to Schumann's side made possible the extraordinary refinement of Brahms's output. It bought him time.

Schumann departed from the scene with shocking swiftness. Just five months after that initial meeting, he attempted suicide by jumping into the Rhine. Two years later, he died in an asylum. The cause of Schumann's insanity, we know from recently published medical diaries, was syphilis. (More scholarly bulletins that did not reach Swafford.) Although

JOHANNES BRAHMS BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Avins thinks otherwise, it seems possible that Brahms was aware of Schumann's syphilis and took it into account. A year after Schumann's death, he wrote to Joachim in praise of a book called *Self-Preservation, a Medical Treatise on the Debilities and Diseases of the Generative Organs Resulting from Solitary Habits, Youthful Excess, or Infection*, and a few months later he wrote to the widow Clara Schumann with the advice that "passions are excesses" and that "passions must be driven off." (No doubt he was speaking more to himself than to her.) The wreck of Schumann's life may have come as a warning not to let sex come in the way of music. That is what I glean from a passage such as this in the letters, from January of 1873: "The memory of Schumann is holy to me. The noble, pure artist ever endures as my ideal and I will probably never be allowed to love a better person—and will also, I hope, never witness the progress of such a dreadful fate from such ghastly proximity—nor have to share so in enduring it."

Proximity: that's the crucial word. Schumann came his way, came very close; then was torn away. Brahms was not a witness to the awful travesty of the suicide attempt, but he seems to have felt himself present at the event, almost as a participant. Swafford puts his finger on something vital when he talks about the peculiar fury of certain of Brahms's openings, particularly the low screaming that is heard at the outset of the First Piano Concerto and the First Symphony. Various writers have suggested, with a rumor of authority from Brahms himself, that the opening of the concerto is a depiction of Schumann's plunge into the water. Swafford speaks in musical terms of why this picture is convincing: the sound is literally "vertiginous," with the orchestra beginning on a low D that turns out to be not the expected tonic of a D minor chord, but the middle pitch of a B-flat-major triad. In technical terms, the chord is an inversion; in programmatic terms, it is tumbling head over heels. Swafford might have added something else: a few days before his suicide attempt, Schumann was assaulted by sonic hallucinations, by a loud sustained tone or a series of iterated pitches. That event might account for the monotone obsessions of the First Concerto, the First Symphony, the "All Flesh Is As Grass" movement of the *German Requiem*, even that soft low D on the timpani in the Second Symphony.

Brahms spent his musical rage quickly. In the 1860s, in works such as the String Sextets, the Horn Trio, and the *Requiem*, he found a free-floating lyric voice, the result of an immersion in Schubert. This he joined with a Beethovenian method of arguing short motives—the principle of "developing variation"—and an original set of rhythmic techniques—



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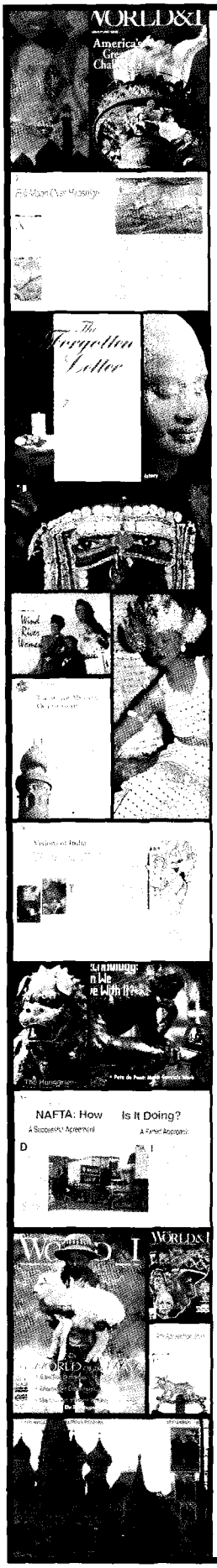


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syncopation, blurring of the bar line, jaunty polyrhythms of three against two or three against four. With his classicism and his muted tone, Brahms set himself off from the dominant Romantic mode of Liszt and Wagner.

Still, it is easy to make too much of the difference between the young Brahms and the mature one. Swafford is often carried away with the urge to give biographical direction and momentum to a largely static life; and in one of his typical flourishes, he writes that "ruthlessly, [Brahms] had sunk the fair features and moonstruck soul of Young Kreisler under the patriarchal beard and forbidding bark of Herr Doktor Brahms." But surely the remarkable change in Brahms's outward appearance should not lead us to imagine that some great inward transformation accompanied it. (On the matter of the beard, Avins notes that nearly all of Brahms's friends had full bourgeois beards, and that Brahms had resisted the fashion for some time.) In terms of compositional tone, Brahms grew, if anything, more lyrical, more dream-besotted, more "youthful" as he grew older. His early works are the most academic, his late works are the most fantastic. A fine epigraph to his career may be found in the aphorism by Novalis that Brahms entered in his notebooks: "Our life is no dream, but ought to be and perhaps will become so."

Brahms did not conform to social type, either the conservative or the bohemian. He believed in the German nation and in the wisdom of the middle class, but he had a tendency toward vagrancy for much of his life, a sympathy for outcasts (at one dinner he raised his glass to toast the Indians at Little Big Horn), and an outspoken contempt for anti-Semites. "Anti-Semitism is madness!" he exploded when it became evident that Karl Lueger was going to be mayor of Vienna. In musical politics, it is true, he proclaimed the supremacy of the past, and he gave little encouragement to young composers. But he was responding to a musical market that had already turned in favor of a "classical" canon.

Even as a young man, in the 1850's, Brahms had experienced the growing bias against new music. A remarkable review of the premiere of his First Piano Concerto began: "New works do not succeed in Leipzig. Again at the fourteenth Gewandhaus concert a composition was borne to its grave." By the 1850s, more than half of the repertory of the Gewandhaus consisted of works by dead composers; by the end of the next decade, the fraction would be three-quarters. The sun shines on the nothing new. Brahms was aware of his audience's love of the past, and he composed with its literacy in mind. His music plays off the canonical models, follows their contours, yet it also goes against their grain. He was never a "progressive," as Schoenberg claimed in a famous essay, but he was sometimes a subversive.

The complexity of Brahms's historical position can be seen in his relationship with Wagner. It is hard to judge who was more responsible for the famous quarrel between them. Brahms fueled the fire in 1860 by signing a manifesto against the "music of the future," which protested "new and outlandish theories contrary to the very nature of music." But Avins points out that Wagner made a conciliatory gesture toward Brahms several years after that episode, inviting him to a party in Vienna. It was Brahms's possibly calculated contact with Mathilde Wesendonck, the woman who inspired *Tristan*, that finally incited Wagner to his usual spewing of bile. By 1879, Brahms was being attacked in the pages of the *Bayreuther Blätter* for dressing himself up as a "Jewish czardas player."

Still, Brahms made a point of praising Wagner, occasionally to his face. One of the treasures of Avins's book is the four-item correspondence between the two, concerning a manuscript of *Tannhäuser* that Brahms had acquired and Wagner wanted back. Brahms agreed to return it if he could have another score as a replacement. *Das Rheingold* came in the mail, and Brahms wrote back a cryptic masterpiece of a letter in which the praise stops a few crucial steps short of effusive. Picture Wagner puzzling over passages such as this: "I give the best and most appropriate thanks daily to the work itself—it does not lie here without being utilized. Maybe this section is not, at first, such a great inducement to the thorough study that your great work demands; this Rheingold did pass through your hands in a very special way, however, and so let the Valkyrie radiate her beauty brightly, so as to outshine its accidental advantage." (Read: the *Ring* turns out to be sublime, though one would never guess it from opening up the score and seeing nothing but E-flat-major chords.)

Brahms is being impish in this letter; he is also being honest. By not making himself clear, he is conveying his mixed feelings about Wagner's music. Again and again in the letters Brahms passes up the chance for the easy, problem-solving phrase: as a result, his correspondence caused countless misunderstandings and strained several friendships. His closest relationships—with Clara Schumann, with Joseph Joachim, with the music-loving surgeon Theodor Billroth—were fraught with tensions and temporary breaks. He could be cruel, callous, unthinking, unfeeling. It is painful to read him berating Joachim for failing to fulfill his promise as a composer, as if such words could help matters. It is painful to read him offhandedly lecturing Clara—one of the great pianists of the age—on the direction and the pace of her career.

Yet his integrity is never in question, and personal gain was never his motive. "He knew his own worth—what great creator does not?—but in his heart he was one of the most profoundly modest men I ever met," wrote the English composer Ethel Smyth. In an age of Wagnerian megalomania, Brahms had a democratic view of the artist's role. "Art is a republic," he wrote to Clara. "Do not confer a higher rank upon any artist, and do not expect the minor ones to look up to him as something higher, as consul." Out of many passages in the letters that give a sense of his down-to-earth worldview, my favorite is a note that Brahms sent to his elderly father in 1867, giving touchingly pedantic instructions on travel from Hamburg to Vienna (with a change in Berlin): "If you continue on right away in Berlin you must take a hackney to the other station. A policeman hands out the voucher at the exit. Before you travel the night through, as is practical in the heat, drink a glass of grog so you sleep well. But take along very little.... No cigars, nothing new, nothing that is taxable. You'll find every conceivable thing here with me." There, basically, is the Life of Brahms.

In his later works Brahms makes a point of relinquishing control, even as he develops his small ideas with obsessive care. Like Wagner, he had read Schopenhauer on the renunciation of self. And where Wagner's renunciations always seemed a bit of a put-on—one is always aware of the vast power being held in check—Brahms's renunciations came as second nature. In the remarkable coda of the Third Symphony, the emphatic first theme from the first movement is given a quiescent, *pianissimo* reprise, as if representing the obliteration of will. Brahms's dominant mode became a melancholy from which self-pity and even self-consciousness were excluded. In a virtuoso tour of the types of bourgeois melancholy, Brinkmann draws attention to the impersonal side of Brahms's sadness: his sense of his own "latecomer" status in tradition, his awareness of the impermanence of the Viennese idyll, his empathy with the lonely crowd. Late Brahms may be summed up



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in Wallace Stevens's phrase, "the celestial ennui of apartments."

Seeking a larger role for the hero of his biography, Swafford hears in Brahms's silences a foreboding of twentieth-century catastrophe. As often, Swafford's rhetoric goes astray—"Austria was succumbing to a ferocious mythology of blood and authoritarianism," and so on—but he is right in urging us to think through the implications of the Biblical texts in the valedictory "Four Serious Songs," and in particular the words, "Who shall bring him to that place, where he may see what comes after him?" (That is Swafford's translation, based on Luther's German.) In *Ecclesiastes*, the words ask a rhetorical question: man should rejoice in work, he cannot see what comes after. But Brahms became his work, and the work is in our midst. We have brought him to this place.

### III.

A century on, do we still speak Brahms's language? I have been listening to performances and recordings throughout the funerary-centenary year, and wondering. A couple of things are clear. First, Brahms is just as widely played, but not quite as deeply loved, as certain other composers in the firmament. His anniversary year overlapped with the bicentennial of Schubert, and it was Schubert who made the masses swoon. At the same time, Brahms is obviously close to the hearts of musicians, as repetitions of his works in chamber concerts show.

Chamber music is the heart of Brahms's achievement. The peculiar freshness and vibrancy that can come through even in an ordinary performance of, say, the Sextet in B-flat is, paradoxically, the result of studied preparation on Brahms's part. Just the scoring of these pieces shows him working at his "republican idea," his conception of music as an affair for inspired amateurs. He often chose nonstandard, ad-hoc ensembles—string sextet, clarinet trio, clarinet quintet—and thus guaranteed that his works would not become the practiced fare of professional groups. And although the amateur musical culture of nineteenth-century Vienna and other cities has largely vanished, performances of the Brahms chamber repertory still tend to be marked by uncommon enthusiasm, by the spontaneity that comes from seeing fresh faces across the music stand.

The symphonies and the concertos are another matter. A year and a half ago, I heard a rendition of the First Piano Concerto by Daniel Barenboim and the Berlin Philharmonic under Claudio Abbado, in which the pianist ran amok with jerky tempos, muddy textures, and general crudity. In the same series of Carnegie Hall concerts, Peter Serkin made a fastidious mystification of the Second Concerto, reading every other phrase against its grain. Abbado's cycle of the symphonies was more satisfying than the concertos, but it demonstrated the grandeur of the orchestra more often than the grandeur of Brahms. At the beginning of this season, Kurt Masur led the New York Philharmonic in a symphony cycle that emphasized sinewy strength at the expense of singing lyricism.

On recording, again, each survey frustratingly seems to possess certain qualities others lack and certain flaws that others correct. The one essential survey of the symphonies may now be had in a new boxed set of Wilhelm Furtwängler's Brahms, on the painstaking Music & Arts label. Furtwängler had the gift of "presenting" the music, its surface narrative flow, while at the same time intervening to show counterintuitive layers underneath. To see what I mean, listen to the opening of the Second: measure by measure, you can hear the wave of melancholy that Swafford felicitously describes as a "chilly shadow falling across a summer meadow." Yet Furtwängler seldom

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gives us a glimpse of Brahms's serenity; he is hungry for tension, much like his supposed arch-rival Toscanini.

The chase after the perfect recording is always doomed to failure, but the exercise is peculiarly infuriating in the case of Brahms. And what is most elusive in the symphonies is clarity. Brahms's instrumentation was, for the most part, thick; he produced what was called in his lifetime a "Brahms fog." Very often the fog is simply the result of poor playing, of an incomplete articulation of tricky rhythmic structures. Gunther Schuller, in his recent jeremiad *The Compleat Conductor*, writes: "The opinion held in many quarters that Brahms's music is heavy and turgid, rather square, even 'academic,' exists primarily because so many *performances* of his music are 'heavy' and 'turgid,' emotionally overladen."

Moreover, as Schuller observes in comparative studies of dozens of recordings, performances of Brahms are simply imprecise. This is a technical problem, and it can be solved by thorough rehearsal. Two conductors who have seriously addressed it on recordings are Charles Mackerras, leading the Scottish Chamber Orchestra on Telarc, and Nikolaus Harnoncourt, leading the Berlin Philharmonic on Teldec. They prepare rhythms with care, and their avoidance of a swamping string sound means that wind and brass counterrhythms come through crisply. In terms borrowed from art restoration, Harnoncourt refers to a process of "stripping away." The problem, as art historians will tell you, is that cleaning often takes away a layer of shadow and mystery. Furtwängler, whose beat was designed to thwart precision, gets a kind of dark withdrawing roar out of his orchestra that Mackerras and Harnoncourt cannot match. Brahms creates a vicious circle for interpreters: it is not easy to achieve both precision and mystery.

Brahms had a difficult habit of thinking privately in a public medium. He indulged sometimes in intellectual constructions that seem to be written "over the players' heads" and directly for the listener. Germans call it *Augenmusik*, or music for the eyes. I'm thinking not of the inaudible games with pitch and harmonic structure that are beloved of academic analysts (though they are there, too), but rather of a game of expectation, of thoughts interrupted and then resumed. The Second Symphony is infiltrated by such moves. The Fourth Symphony, that strange and wonderful work with which Brahms ended his short engagement with the symphonic medium, shows the game at its height. The very opening is an aural trick. The first theme, a violin figure arranged around falling cycles of thirds, is so casual as to seem pedestrian: it's as if Brahms pulled back the curtain on a symphony already in progress. How do you conduct that? It's almost impossible. Conductors lean in to that first phrase, trying to give it some heft, trying to break into the audience's preliminary coughing and shuffling. But I think Brahms wants the audience almost not to notice the symphony, at first. Here is another of his anti-Beethoven effects, the reverse of the famous attention-getting E-flat chords of the *Eroica*.

The deliberately plain material in the Fourth—one Viennese wit wrote under the first theme, "Once more ... I have ... not much ... to say"—becomes a foil, of course, for much developing variation. But Brahms transforms the main theme most incisively not by altering it, but by altering its context. In the recapitulation, at the point where we expect the theme in thirds to return, we hear it first in muffled, slowed-down, "frozen" form (to quote Walter Frisch's excellent book); and between each halting phrase is an arpeggiated shudder in the strings, like wind through a ruin. Sonata form has fallen apart—not a swift collapse, as in Mahler, but some kind of vegetable decay. And then the first theme resumes—in the original ambling tempo, in the original laid-back scoring, and *in the middle of the phrase*. It is a cinematic coup, a jump cut to the humdrum song that is still in progress. And this effect really does seem to be impossible to play. To adopt Schuller's pedantic-paranoid style, I have listened to a dozen recordings and found not one in which the violins give this impression of a "cut." Always they impose a ritardando—"alright, now *here's* the theme"—where no such inflection is indicated in the score. Brahms has scissored the natural phrase, and violinists are naturally disinclined to follow him.

If the first movement of the Fourth is so sophisticated as to be unperformable, the finale is something else again: a display of pure power that seems to contradict the quietistic trajectory of Brahms's career. Where the Second and Third had told a story in opposition to heroic Romanticism, the finale of the Fourth adopts again the raging tone of Brahms's youth. Yet it is not the same as before. To take another phrase from Stevens, this is music in motion and not in motion. At its base is a grand chaconne, in 30 variations. The Baroque form is overlaid, as Frisch demonstrates, with a sonata form. Form upon form, layer upon layer: the music gives the impression not of a ranting individual but of a ranting architecture.

At the center of the movement, there is a respite: a soft, halting funeral procession for flute and brass. This is also, in Frisch's scheme, the second theme of the sonata form. The brass choirs irresistibly remind one of *Tannhäuser*, the work over which Brahms and Wagner had their epistolary fight. Wagner died not long before this symphony was written, and Brahms may been bowing his head to his great rival. If so, his gesture, like his last letter, might have been partly sardonic: Wagner is the contrasting, "feminine" theme. And the solemnity is soon disrupted by a more vehement statement of the main theme. One imagines an outdoor funeral ruined by a storm.

There are probably other jokes in this furious farewell. The Baroque structure has always made commentators think that Brahms is musing on the past, but I think he is also speaking to his contemporaries. He is donning the garb of the ancients to deliver a sermon on the music of the present. The movement could have had the same scathing inscription as the Rondo Burlesque of Mahler's Ninth: "To my brothers in Apollo." It is no coincidence that Mahler at his most sarcastic quotes Brahms: compare the downward-stabbing figure in the second movement of Mahler's Fifth with the first theme of the Brahms First, or the up-and-down figure in the Rondo Burlesque with the finale of the Piano Quintet in F Minor.

The savagery of the Fourth's finale might seem to confirm Brinkmann's reading of the movement as an exercise in philosophical negation, as an act of creative destruction. Brinkmann goes so far as to compare it with the fictional works of Adrian Leverkühn in Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, especially the famous idea of the "taking back" of Beethoven's Ninth. Yet the music does not support this view. Brahms may be lashing out at his contemporaries, but he is at the same time standing firmly on the ground of tradition and keeping a tight hold on the symphonic ideal. Any new sound, he implies, can be filtered through the inherited language. The movement's premonitions of the spectral scoring of the Second Viennese School—its atomization of orchestral sound into floating timbres—show the necessity of a negotiation between past and future. And the tone is not quite tragic. There is a joy in darkness here, an animal pleasure in the exercise of force. In the second variation, the brass and timpani make a curious noise—rrrrrRUH! rrrrrRUH!—like the growl of a sleepy dog.

What is this movement "about," if not the triumph of darkness? I wonder



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whether it is in some way a final answer to the question posed in the agonized years after Schumann's death. Why is light given? What do we have that is better than death? In all of the late works, Brahms may be contemplating that problem. In the late piano music, in such spells of sadness as the Intermezzos Opus 117, he extols solitude. In the chamber works for clarinet, he values companionship, long conversations into the night. In the "Four Serious Songs," the memorial to Clara, the final word is "love." But in the Fourth Symphony he speaks in tones of rationalized thunder, as if reading aloud from the text of God's own contemptuous answer to Job: "Where is the way that light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof?... Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?"

The radiant terror of God's works finds an analogue in a tour de force of all musical history and all musical possibility. Around and around they go, Wagner and Bach, chorale and folk tune, village band and *Klangfarbenmelodie*. At the center is nothing, the gray void that the first movement revealed in two or three shivering shots. The whole of it seems to be demonstration of Nietzsche's dictum that "without music, life would be a mistake." The demonstration is convincing. •

# *The Uses of Illiteracy*

**By Eva Hoffman**

## The Reader
## by Bernhard Schlink
## translated by Carol Brown Janeway

**(Pantheon, 218 pp., $21)**

Several years ago I was asked to participate in a public discussion with a German author who had written a memoir about the anguish and the guilt of growing up as a daughter of a minor Nazi functionary. I spent some time wondering whether I could work up the requisite sympathy for her plight; and I came to the conclusion that sympathy was warranted. As I read more memoirs and studies on this subject, I began to think that the difficulties faced by the "second generation" in Germany were in their way as painful as the problems often experienced by children of Holocaust survivors. For the inheritors of the Nazi legacy, a moral life seemed to require a condemnation of their parents—an excruciating, an almost impossible, conflict. How do you feel about someone you love whom you have a duty to hate?

This predicament is at the heart of *The Reader*, a brief, restrained novel by Bernhard Schlink. It has been published to great acclaim in several European countries; and its success—following on the enraptured reception of *The Emigrants*, another semifictional work by a German writer, W.G. Sebald, that obliquely explores Holocaust themes—undoubtedly reflects the new fascination with the role and the responsibility of ordinary Germans in that terrible crime.

Most fiction about the Holocaust begins with the experience of victims and survivors. Schlink proposes to examine, from the perspective of the second generation, the mind and the darkly ambiguous past of a perpetrator. And unlike many novels on that subject, which attempt to recreate the inner world of their characters through linguistic and imaginative intensity, *The Reader* works more like a fictionalized essay, or even a polemic, about the figure at its center. Schlink, who was born in 1944, is the author of crime fiction, as well as a professor of law at the University of Berlin and a judge, and his new work bears the hallmarks of his favored genre. The prose (in an admirably controlled translation by Carol Brown Janeway) is clear and spare, the chapters short, the plot tight and streamlined. But the crime in this novel is enormous enough to call for philosophical investigation; and within the stylistic framework of a swiftly paced detective story, Schlink has indeed composed a kind of philosophical parable.

In a way, *The Reader* is a very old-fashioned work. Its tone is sincere to the point of earnestness, its formulations are classical, its mode of address frankly direct. It is as if the gravity of the subject precludes fictive games or a purely aesthetic suspension of disbelief. But such a strategy carries its own dangers. The


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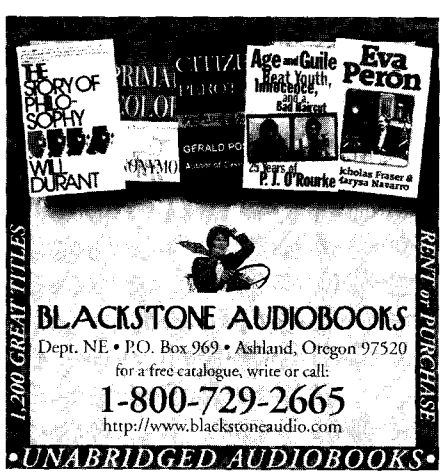





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novel is serious, searching, sometimes daring; and its meditations gratifyingly combine highmindedness and accessibility. Yet the seeming transparency conceals an odd opaqueness. There are unspoken implications and narrative gaps that leave this reader, at least, very uneasy.

The events in *The Reader* are recounted by one Michael Berg, the novel's governing consciousness as well as its narrator, through a series of compressed, sharply etched recollections. Act One, as it were, takes place in an unnamed German city in the 1950s. It opens with an infection and an illicit love affair. The narrator, who is 15 years old at the time, suffers a racking attack of hepatitis on the street and is rescued by an older woman named Hanna. He finds himself almost hypnotically drawn to her, and when he goes back to thank her, she offers herself sexually, without fuss or apology. Despite the disparity in their ages—Hanna is 36 and old enough to be his mother—the liaison unfolds with a sense of rightness, with a fierce inevitability.

Hanna is convincingly portrayed as a woman whose attractiveness resides in her sturdiness and her physical ease, in a lack of selfconsciousness that amounts either to obliviousness or a kind of integrity. The romance takes place in an encapsulated space in which ordinary rules of social intercourse are suspended. Hanna tells the narrator almost nothing about herself, except that she works as a streetcar conductor. He can carry on the affair only if she remains sealed off from his family and schoolmates. Their meetings consist mostly of bathing and lovemaking. Then, at her behest, the ritual begins to include intimate literary sessions, in which the narrator reads to her as a prelude to sex.

Schlink evokes the atmosphere in which the affair takes place—the shabby grandeur of Hanna's building, the odorous languor of her apartment, the slow luxury of the erotic encounters—in deft, economical strokes. In a way, the fictional apparatus of the novel is minimal. There are few extended scenes, few moments of heightened metaphoric density or "thick description." Indeed, for all the sensuality of the early tableaux, *The Reader* gradually acquires some of the severity of a legal or logical argument, in which propositions are set forth and then tested from various points of view.

In describing the emotional calculus of the affair, Schlink keeps turning the lens so that the picture falls into different configurations. Initially Hanna easily dominates her young lover, whom she calls "kid," through sheer sexual authority. In worldly terms, however, the advantage is all on his side. He comes from a proper, chilly, middle-class family—his father is a philosopher, an expert on Kant—and he is on his way to a good education and a successful career. Hanna envies and admires his access to these goods, and she is hungry for the books he shares with her. As the affair progresses, the balance of power shifts. She allows him to take the lead in various activities and suffers moments of inexplicable pique. He learns that he has the power to hurt her. As he is gradually drawn into the life of his peers, he begins, in imperceptible ways, to distance himself from her, to "disavow" her. Then one day, for no apparent reason, Hanna leaves her job and vanishes.

Act Two consists of detection and discovery; and in order to make the book intelligible, some of the surprises must be disclosed here. A few years after Hanna's disappearance, the narrator, who has started studying law, recognizes her as one of the defendants in a trial of former concentration camp guards that he is observing. It transpires that Hanna served as a guard in Auschwitz and in a "small camp near Cracow." Even more horribly, she was one of several wardens accompanying a group of Jewish women on a death march. Along with the others, she failed to come to the prisoners' rescue when they were set on fire during a night-time bombing raid and burned to death in a locked village church.

But Hanna has also another secret, which the narrator deduces from various retrospective clues. It is that she is illiterate. Once he stumbles on the solution to this riddle, much that was puzzling about his former lover—her bafflement, her rage—begins to make sense. The narrator also realizes that, while by any overt measure her wartime deeds are the far more awful fact, for Hanna her illiteracy is her really shameful secret, the prior wound that determines all her subsequent decisions. It is her illiteracy that induces her to sign up with the SS in the first place, rather than risk exposure in the Siemens factory where she works. It is the same dread of humiliation that forces her to flee her street conductor's job when she is offered promotion, and leads her to incriminate herself in court for transgressions that she did not commit and to accept a harsher sentence than her less honest and more brazen codefendants.

Is she, then, a kind of victim herself? The narrator is careful to avoid this equation; but the two revelations about Hanna leave him with a distressing double vision. She emerges as a perpetrator of atrocities, and she is someone driven to protect her dignity and her psychic survival. The ambiguities of her actions converge on the charged trope of reading, as a witness testifies that in the concentration camp Hanna singled out the most frail inmates and ordered them to read to her before they were transported to Auschwitz. To the audience and the jury at the trial, this seems like a particularly perverse form of cruelty. To the narrator, the twisted rite carries suggestions of Hanna's vulnerability, and perhaps even of her kindness: he believes that she chose the most delicate inmates in order to make the last months before their deaths more bearable.

Who, then, is Hanna, and which evidence is the narrator to trust? Is she a temperamental sadist, or a marginal person acting out of defensiveness and fear? A callous manipulator who abused him during their affair, or a woman moved by confusion and need? The narrator believes that Hanna's crimes deserve punishment; and yet he cannot see her as wholly culpable or wholly evil. The latter part of the novel is given over to Michael Berg's struggle, as he tries to come to terms with these wrenching paradoxes and the history that Hanna signifies.

To some extent, the stages of his journey parallel the wider postwar response to the Holocaust. His first encounter with the details of life in the camps plunges him into a state of shock, followed by a kind of deadly numbness—a state of paralysis, he provocatively suggests, that characterized everyone in the camps themselves, from the inmates to the guards. He has distressing fantasies of Hanna as a pornographic Nazi mistress. He becomes alert to signs of nastiness and to traces of Nazism in the ordinary world around him. He visits a concentration camp and is ashamed of his inability to envision what happened there, and of his desire afterwards to find a good restaurant. A few years after the trial, the narrator withdraws from the active practice of law, because he is unable to play the part of the prosecution or the defense; he has witnessed a public miscarriage of justice in Hanna's trial, and he finds private truth too complex for unequivocal judgment. For all his attempts to purge Hanna from his mind, his marriage and his other relationships fail as a consequence of her primacy in his psyche.

But even as he observes his fastidious sensitivities, the narrator questions the authenticity of his sentiments. Schlink is astute about the postures adopted by his contemporaries toward the Holocaust: the reduction of catastrophe to a few



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stark images, the injunction not to "compare the incomparable," the temptations of facile identification or righteousness. "That some few would be convicted and punished while we of the second generation were silenced by revulsion, shame, and guilt—was that all there was to it now?" the narrator rhetorically asks, and it is the chief merit of *The Reader* that it refuses to accept this as the end of the matter, and tries to move its inquiry beyond awe or piety.

In the last sections of the novel, 20 years are telescoped into a few dramatic turns of narrative. Eight years into Hanna's imprisonment, Michael Berg begins to read to her again, by means of a tape-recorder, and sends the cassettes to her without any comment. Some time later, he starts receiving clumsily handwritten notes from her, with remarks on the books that he has chosen. Hanna has become literate, and turns out to be a perceptive if uneducated critic.

A decade later, Hanna's plea for clemency is granted and the narrator has to contemplate, with considerable reluctance, her reentry into his life. He visits her in prison on a single occasion, to find an aging and no longer desirable woman. Then, the day before her release, he learns that she has committed suicide. Her death is yet another enigma for him to "read," to subject to the uncertainties of interpretation. But the scheme of the novel strongly suggests that Hanna killed herself partly as a result of her late-won literacy, because she could not bear to know what she had done. The shelf in her cell contains books on the Holocaust, which presumably allowed her finally to grasp the full measure of the horror in which she participated.

There is still a further twist of the plot, which for the narrator constitutes a kind of catharsis and reconciliation. How we read this narrative as a whole depends very much on what we make of the central theme of reading and its symbolic uses in the novel. Schlink plays variations on this motif with ingenuity, and in at least two registers. In one, "reading" is treated in its metaphoric sense, as an exercise in decoding and interpreting; and in this sense the novel is about the problem of reading, the difficulties of fathoming human character, motivations, deeds. Schlink is subtle about the dynamics of power inherent in this semiotic transaction. In one sense, Hanna looms powerfully over the narrator's life; the past infects and burdens the present. At the same time, however, his generational position confers on him an advantage, since it places him in the role of the observer, the analyst, the critic—the superior reader.

He may judge; she may only be judged. Yet the narrator recognizes that his position is not only a form of safety, but also a form of bad faith. This is one of the novel's finer discriminations. He is above suspicion because he is unimplicated and untested by history. By the more intimate criteria of his conscience, however, he is neither completely self-knowing nor completely blameless. In entering into the affair with Hanna, he was driven by obscure, half-conscious impulses; and when she became inconvenient, he disowned and betrayed her. He is capable of cold detachment, which masquerades as generalized compassion. It is only when he becomes a writer as well as a reader that he puts himself on the line, in the position of engagement. And it is when he submits his stories to Hanna's readings that he accords her parity, or the right to judge him as well.

The other strand of the "reading" theme has to do with the word's literal meaning, and all its resonances of erudition, taste, culture; and it is in his treatment of this seemingly innocent motif that Schlink enters murkier waters. In linking illiteracy and brutality, Schlink is introducing explanatory ideas about the Holocaust that have been deeply discredited precisely by that event. It has been noted often enough that reading Goethe and listening to Beethoven did not prevent the Nazi elite from planning or executing genocide; and after such lessons, the uncritical belief that good books make good people is rather hard to sustain.

*The Reader* is clearly designed as a deliberate countermove in this argument. Culture civilizes, Schlink seems to insist; and ignorance can make us barbaric. The narrator's love of literature is closely tied to his ethical refinement. Moreover, as if to underscore his intention to reclaim literature from post-Holocaust disillusionment, Schlink weighs the narrator's list heavily toward German classics—the literary tradition which, for some, was most tainted by association. Conversely, Hanna's illiteracy in the novel is supposed to account for a moral obtuseness so extreme as to render irrelevant the notions of culpability and responsible choice. The possibility that she may have done something wrong does not occur to her until the trial, and her moral sense develops only with her access to the written word.

The narrative here seems to be based on some highly questionable assumptions. Is it plausible to suppose that this woman did not understand the meaning of her work in the camps because she did not get a proper education? That she would have been less willing to inflict suffering if she had gone to high school? That she could not respond to the suffering around her because she had not read poetry?

To be fair, this is not quite what the novel suggests; illiteracy in the story stands not only for the deficiency of book-learning, but also for the inability to decipher the world and the attendant helplessness. Owing to her insulation, Hanna gets caught in situations that she has not chosen, and whose wider context, meanings, implications she cannot grasp. Nor is this a premise to be dismissed too glibly. Culture may not be a reliable agent of benignness; but severe cultural deprivation may certainly have malign effects. And yet Schlink's invention remains hard to justify. The notion that Hanna literally did not know what she was doing, that she was blind to the extremities of brutality around her, because she could not read, is a dubious premise for a novel, and for a view of the catastrophe.

## *Sharon*

I am the girl guide
whom you thought
would be male and muscled
from shoving off,
encountering cataracts,
sudden shoals,
but as you can see,
this is no Grand Canal,
this is not grand. Forget it—
we barely float, and I kick
those who moan,
those who lean so far
toward the fading shore
I have to pull ballast
and protect the lines.
We do a lot of fishing
on the crossing. After all,
dreams are just carp
under the surface
and you've got to eat.
And eventually, there's
the singing to lead,
the handing out of oars,
and for some, the seasick pills,
all of which takes time,
what I'm out to spend,
that last trickle down the tub
that we make go quick. A girl
is good for this, a man
trouble—he thinks what he sees
will save him. It's still
like that. When the white light
business breaks, all I say is
we've been in a fog.
I put down my pole, I pull.

**TERESE SVOBODA**



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The problem with *The Reader* is that Hanna's illiteracy remains an empty sign, a notional explanation much too cool for the novel's diabolical subject. Hanna's character in the entire story is filtered through the narrator's vision and voice; but her wartime past in particular is presented so sparsely, and at such a speculative remove, that the force of her ignorance in that situation is never persuasively shown. In order to give credence to the connection between illiteracy and character, we would need a fuller, more strenuous recreation of her activity in the camps, her feelings, her impressions, her reactions, the clash of her naïveté with her complicity in the horror.

When Schlink does give us glimpses of Hanna's inner life, he can be very effective. He describes the crucial episode in the death march both from her standpoint and from the standpoint of her victims, and has the narrator conjecture about her fear and confusion, as the locked church turns into a burning inferno. This is harrowing to read. Our first instinct is to recoil from having to imagine Hanna's part in this scene; and yet the unflinching calm with which her minute calculations are reconstructed forces us to acknowledge the possibility of someone in her position making deadly mistakes out of disorientation, choicelessness, panic. Evil works in many ways, and can be the result of an individual's weakness as well as an individual's strength. From fragments of her own testimony, it is clear that Hanna isn't sure even in the courtroom how she could have acted differently, nor can anyone tell her.

But such close-ups are rare. Most of the time, Hanna is observed in a neutral middle distance, which obviates the necessity of full engagement. Schlink has created a protagonist endowed with a conveniently partial knowledge of the "problem" character. The narrator knows Hanna enough to see her as fleshly, frightened, human; but he does not have enough access to her subjectivity or her past to allow him to grapple directly with the reality of her actions. In purely fictional terms, Hanna is most vividly portrayed as a lover, but we see nothing of her sinister work in the camps. This is an evasion, and it undermines the novel's case for, or about, Hanna. The novel's presentation of that case is unsupported by the kind of exploration that would permit us to see Hanna as a three-dimensional figure; and therefore we are left with the suspicion that the impulse to exonerate her, so palpable in the novel, is based on spurious grounds and partial evidence.

Still, the quandary posed in Schlink's novel is real enough, and it does not admit of easy resolution. How are we to understand someone such as Hanna—an ordinary person capable of desire and yearning, who turns her hand to monstrous work for a time? By what criteria is she to be appraised, and what would constitute true justice toward her? What is demanded of us in retribution or compassion? The conclusion of the book does not entail simple forgiveness. Instead, the narrator decides to treat Hanna as a free person in the Kantian sense—that is, as someone responsible for all her choices. (This is a novel for which the *Prolegomenon to a Metaphysics of Morals* would make useful background reading.) But he also realizes that he cannot undo the ties that bind him to Hanna. He must accept the consequences of his Oedipal love, even if he didn't know who it was exactly that he loved.

Schlink is at his best in analyzing the symptoms and the syndromes of the second generation: its convolutions of conscience, its tormented search for truth, its comfortable self-deceptions. He has the courage to say a few honest things about delicate and difficult matters, and to admit ambivalence about a subject which in our time stands for moral absolutes. *The Reader* does not carry its investigation into the destructive side of the human soul far enough, but in trying to come to terms with the most forbidding aspects of the Holocaust, it offers a gravity of purpose, an acknowledgment of complexity, and a sober, measured tone. It deserves a commensurate reader.

EVA HOFFMAN is the author, most recently, of *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Houghton Mifflin).

# *The Lucid Moment*

**BY ADAM KIRSCH**

## Mysticism for Beginners
## by Adam Zagajewski
## translated by Clare Cavanagh

**(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 71 pp., $20)**

## Two Cities:
## On Exile, History, and the Imagination
## by Adam Zagajewski
## translated by Lillian Vallee

**(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 265 pp., $24)**

A poetry of mysticism, now? For a mystic of the seventeenth century, for Vaughan or Traherne, the object of mysticism was the old one, the obvious one: God, or Christ. For a Romantic neo-Platonist such as Shelley, the object was less clear, but still plausible: the Idea, the great pattern hidden from human sight. But if Romanticism was spilt religion, today the spill has just about been sopped up; and the presumption, or even the suggestion, of a mystical dimension to life can seem anachronistic, an evasion of the real and secular responsibilities of the time. So how can a poet—an intelligent, serious poet—write mystical verse now? The poetry of Adam Zagajewski provides the beginning of an answer to this question.

Zagajewski is the preeminent Polish poet of his generation. He is a thoroughly contemporary man who aspires, without embarrassment, to a verse that is a concrete avenue to an invisible reality. And the peculiar forms into which this situation forces him, the poetic strategies and the poetic evasions that it requires, reveal a great deal about the possibilities of poetry today.

Zagajewski was born in Lvov, in eastern Poland, in 1945. Within the year his family was transplanted to the western city of Gliwice, victims of the postwar redrawing of Poland's borders. As a student he moved to Cracow, and after several clashes with the authorities emigrated to Paris in 1982. Zagajewski emerged as a prominent poet and polemicist in 1974 with the publication of *The Unrepresented World*, a critical



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manifesto which, as Stanislaw Baranczak wrote in these pages, "stirred up one of the greatest controversies in postwar Polish culture [by attacking] the noncommittal literature of the previous decades." As Zagajewski ruefully wrote years later, "I took my place among the Catos of this world for a while, among those who know what literature should be and ruthlessly exact these standards from others." Of this phase of his career, English-readers have nothing—his first book published in English, *Tremor*, dates from 1985, well into his Paris period. Yet it is crucial for understanding his later development, since the poet whom we know from his five American books is in full flight from this politically engaged view of poetry. Indeed, the antinomy between politics and poetry—or between history and art, or between the collective and the private—is the main argument of his mature work.

This flight from history was a product of history, specifically the history of Communism in Poland. After the Solidarity movement rose to prominence in 1980, Zagajewski sensed that Communism in Poland was in retreat. Not defeated, of course—Solidarity was driven underground by the proclamation of martial law in 1981—but beginning its decline; within ten years it would be dead. Zagajewski's poems and essays of the 1980s—collected in *Tremor* and *Solidarity, Solitude*—look forward quite consciously to a life after totalitarianism, in which "antitotalitarianism" will no longer be a sufficient worldview. Zagajewski in this phase is preparing the ground for post-Communist Polish intellectual life. He points insistently to a world beyond the old definitions of good and evil, a world in which a truly private mental existence, unfettered but also unenergized by the struggle with communism, will have to find other reasons for being.

These concerns are announced in the title of *Solidarity, Solitude*, the remarkable collection of essays that appeared in 1990. As he writes in the preface to that book: "The word 'Solidarity' on the jacket of this book stands mostly for *the* Solidarity, a dynamic, robust, political and social movement in Poland.... Solitude stands for literature, art, meditation, for immobility." Zagajewski is not for solitude and against Solidarity, or solidarity; a concern for public justice is rather a kind of precondition, a given, for men of good will. But neither is he for solidarity at the expense of solitude, which gives access to another realm: the world of art, beauty, epiphanous experience. As he writes in the title essay of *Two Cities*:

> The piercing sense of community, intimacy, of possessing something elusive—that half-legendary country of Poland.... An even more important ingredient of this philosophy was a thesis I knew well ... that all is social, common, and collective.
>
> I did not know how to formulate my opposition, I did not have the appropriate arguments at my disposal; but I did feel that not everything belonged to everybody. We are different and we also experience things which social groups will never know.

Zagajewski's difficulty, as a poet in a time of national crisis, was that these two realms are, strictly speaking, incommensurable: art (that is, art which is truly and only art) does not get the tanks off the streets, and mass movements do not write poems.

The dilemma of solidarity and solitude is unfamiliar to an American, and it may be difficult for an American to enter into it fully. Here poetry is such a minor, sidelined pursuit that its practitioners by and large never even think of using their art to serve a larger cause. (The few writers who do make poems into polemics, such as Adrienne Rich or Audre Lorde, generally fail at both.) For some critics—George Steiner most egregiously—this amounts to a complacency that diminishes American art. On this view, the moral crisis of Eastern Europe gives poetry an urgency and a public stature that it can never have in the United States, where it is largely a hobby confined to writing workshops.

Zagajewski's work is important for its rejection of this view. His writing, in poetry and in prose, is in part an attempt to diagnose the deformities of a poetry under too much public pressure, a poetry that feels a duty to participate in politics. As a poet who feels poetry to be a calling in an older, more Romantic sense, Zagajewski knows well that there is a zone of solitude, of "immobility," which is necessary for writing perfectly achieved poetry. Indeed, Zagajewski parodies the Steiner view quite devastatingly in "Central Europe," a short sketch from *Two Cities*:

> He was an unremarkable, tiny man with dark greasy hair combed flat across his head who, without waiting for permission, joined my table. It was clear he was dying to talk. He would have exchanged half his life for a moment of conversation.
>
> "Where are you from?" he asked.
>
> "From Poland," I said.
>
> "Ah, how lucky, how lucky you are!" he exclaimed, overcome by genuine Mediterranean enthusiasm. "Mourning! Long live mourning!... You are a lucky man."
>
> "Why lucky?"
>
> "Force. Force of conviction. Categorical feelings. Moral integrity. A literature that is not alienated from the polis. You have not experienced that alarming split.... I always felt in you the desire for unity, the Greek dream of combining emotion and courage...."

This Westerner is using Poland just as generations of modern Westerners have used Greece, or the Renaissance, or the Middle Ages: as an imagined ideal, an instrument of vicarious living, a name for a condition of spiritual wholeness. He values the mournful country for its solidarity. He even envies it.

In Zagajewski's view, however, solidarity is not a mode in which the poet—or, indeed, any reflective person—can come to rest. Rather, he sees solidarity as the antithesis that arises in opposition to the thesis of totalitarianism: "Totalitarians have their own primitive seal, which they stamp onto the wax of reality. Antitotalitarians have fashioned their own seal. And it, too, shapes the wax.... Poor wax, lashed by seals!" Solidarity is something with which Zagajewski would like to dispense, in the way that one puts away a tool that has served its purpose. Scorn, hatred, loathing for totalitarianism is everywhere in his work; but so is a distrust of antitotalitarianism, the other seal that


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If you question the accuracy of the Bible's story of Jesus and you enjoy historical detective work, you'll appreciate Jack Hannah's analysis of two newly unearthed ancient documents about Jesus. It argues convincingly for their sayings' being ipsissimis verbis of Jesus, which invalidate the Bible's claims and indicate that Jesus favored Epicurean philosophy. This reverses Jesus from being in line with the idealism of a Platonic-Stoic-Jewish world view to being a realist rejecting Providence, creationism, and much else that idealists associate with the Divine. Hannah provides complete text of the sources, chronologically ordered and explained.

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disfigures the wax of reality.

*Solidarity, Solitude*, then, is a manifesto, but not of the kind that Zagajewski produced in *The Unrepresented World*. It is a manifesto against manifestos, a warning against too much solidarity, written at a time when solidarity was both a necessary stance and a kind of moral intoxicant. Zagajewski reminds his countrymen that "we have to conquer totalitarianism in passing, on our way to greater things, in the direction of this or that reality, even though we may be unable to say exactly what reality is." When one considers how tempting solidarity can be, and how difficult and lonely a private definition of reality is, the real nobility of such a statement begins to emerge. At a time when collective thought and collective identity came under the seductive sign of liberation, Zagajewski was self-possessed enough to remain wary of history.

But once Zagajewski has made his choice for privacy, for the inner life, he is faced with a more difficult problem, and one which is less specific to Poland. To write against the public and historical life, and in favor of the private and individual life, is still to be conditioned by the public, even if one's response to it is a negative one. In *Solidarity, Solitude* Zagajewski turns his back on one definition of life and of its purpose, but it is not yet clear what he has turned toward. What *is* the inner life? And it is here that Zagajewski becomes, not only a Polish poet, but to a great extent a representative poet of our time.

When Zagajewski begins to write about things not conditioned by history—and, in his books, this is clearly the role set aside for poetry, as opposed to prose—we find him strangely inexplicit. Zagajewski is, in some sense, a mystic; the title of his new book is *Mysticism for Beginners*, and throughout his poetry we find a longing toward the mystical as the natural consummation of the private, the ahistorical. But he is certainly not a mystic in the sense that Yeats was a mystic. He doesn't have a doctrine or a system or a single truth; he remains at the point of hoping that perhaps there is such a truth, though he will probably never comprehend it.

In this paradoxical way, Zagajewski is representative: he is a mystical poet of the liberal imagination. He cannot abide oppression of the spirit, even when it comes wearing the friendly face of the Solidarity movement; he insists on solitude, on the freedom to go where his thoughts lead him. But then he finds that they lead him to no place in particular. One (admittedly narrow) definition of liberalism is neutrality; but what happens when the collective no longer cares to direct the spirit? The individual is thrown back on his own resources, which very often turn out to be inadequate. Zagajewski is the poet of this situation, which is responsible both for the universality of his appeal and for the important restrictions of his poetry.

One of those restrictions, of course, lies not in the poems, but in ourselves: almost no American reader will be able to read these poems in the original. How much is really lost in translation is a constant question; but it is likely to be closer to everything than to nothing. And the difficulty with Zagajewski's poetry is the greater because he is, in Schiller's sense, a sentimental poet: he writes about a feeling rather than from within a feeling, and writing about delicate emotions is perhaps the most difficult thing to do in poetry without sounding ridiculous. It is much easier successfully to write a clever line, or a sounding line, than a tender line. And the margin between the touching and the maudlin is inevitably blurred in translation.

Typically, Zagajewski reaches sentiment through the maze of irony, thus justifying the reward by the difficulty of the quest. His characteristic voice is sophisticated and witty, with deep feeling lying just beneath the surface. But occasionally he will write a poem, usually a short one, that is pure sentiment:

Anecdote of Rain

I was strolling under
the tents of trees
and raindrops occasionally reached me
as though asking:
Is your desire to suffer,
to sob?

Soft air,
wet leaves;
—the scent was spring,
the scent sorrow.

This poem is like one of those sweet, sad lyrics of Eichendorff or Heine that Schumann set to music—not just because of the concision and the directness of the sentiment, but also because of the English speaker's sense that something is missing. It is a beautiful poem, but beautiful in a way that no one writing in English could manage without embarrassment. Reading Zagajewski is, in part, a continual negotiation with this embarrassment, an attempt to recognize that what's missing is just what could redeem the poems from excess of sentiment.

But this is a technical problem, which most likely arises from our ignorance of Polish. There is also a deeper sentiment here, which is not accidental but essential. It is attached to the subject of mystical experience, which for Zagajewski is a constant, tantalizing possibility, if one which is seldom attained. In *Solidarity, Solitude*, the poet insisted that the most important events are private, not public; and in his poetry, we see that these important events are often mystical, which is privacy carried to the point of incommunicability.

In fact, they become more explicitly mystical as Zagajewski's work progresses. In *Tremor*, his first American book, we already see that what matters most to Zagajewski is the transitory feeling of completion, of clarity, which is the hallmark of mystical experience. This feeling comes up in poem after poem, sometimes tinged with wit, sometimes given directly:

Don't allow the lucid moment to dissolve
Let the radiant thought last in stillness
though the page is almost filled and
the flame flickers...

At night, an invisible bonfire blazes,
the fire which, burning, doesn't destroy
but creates, as if it wanted to restore
*in one moment all that was ravished*
by flames on various continents...

The quest for perfection
will find fulfillment casually, it will bypass
all obstacles just as the Germans
learned how to bypass the Maginot Line...

.... there was so much of the world that
it had to do encores over and over,
the audience was in frenzy and didn't want
to leave the house.

These are all descriptions of a single feeling, in various manifestations. And it is characteristic of this mystical feeling that it is transitory and incomplete:

The earth won't open up, a thunderbolt
won't burn fiery letters on
the sky's pelt. Did we deserve
a sign so distinct, we who
talk too loudly and can't
listen? A train pulls out
when the stationmaster raises his
arm, but a waterfall doesn't wait for
a signal.
A leaf will sway, a drop of water will glisten.

Or again:

Clear moments are so short.
There is much more darkness. More
ocean than firm land. More
shadow than form.

Such "clear moments" become more common in his later books of poetry, *Canvas* (1991) and now *Mysticism for*



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*Beginners*. In these later books, there is a growing sense that the instant of rapt attention to the world is the center of life, and the proper subject for poetry. These poems are shot through with intimations of immortality:

> So what if Pharaoh's armies pursue you,
> when eternity is woven
> through the days of the week like moss
> in the chinks of a cabin?
>
> Turn off the glaring sun,
> listen to the tale of the seed of a poppy.
> A fence. Chestnut trees. Bindweed. God.
>
> A moment of quiet
> covenant
> in the Egyptian museum
> in Turin...

Here the mysticism is reminiscent of Rilke, at a lower pitch. Zagajewski's litany ("A fence. Chestnut trees. Bindweed. God.") recalls the litany in the *Duino Elegies*:

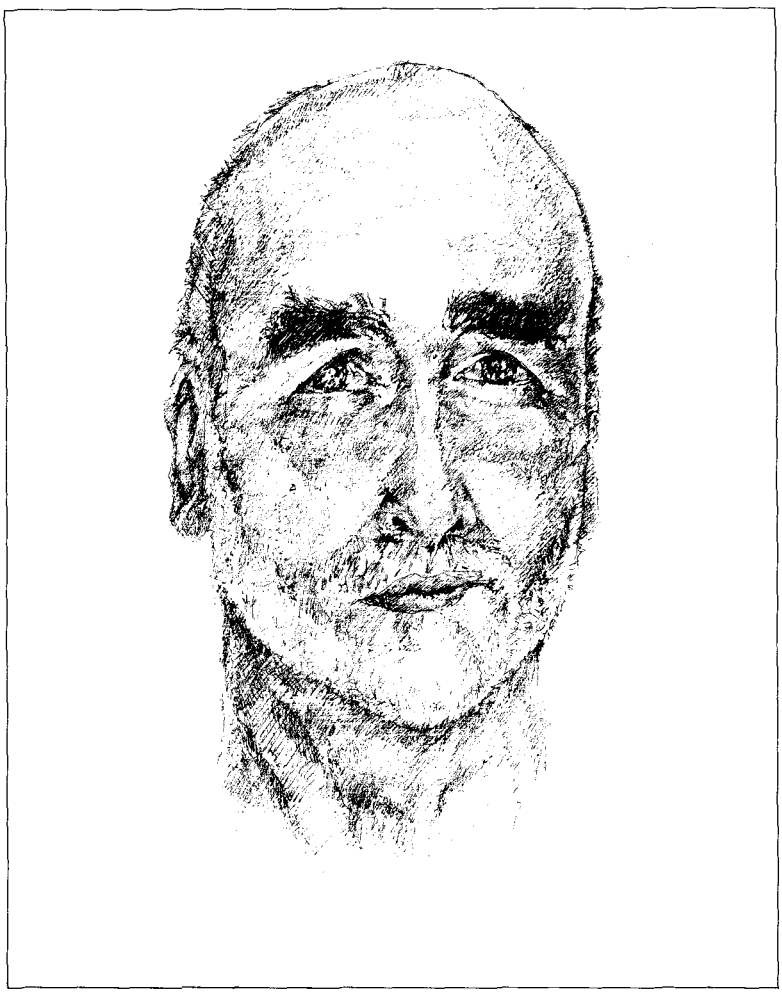
> Maybe we're here only to
> say: house,
> bridge, well, gate, jug,
> olive tree, window—
> at most: pillar, tower. . . .

Like Rilke, Zagajewski is overcome at times by a powerful sense that the singular being of objects conceals some higher truth. For him, too, things are the sites of illumination.

But for Zagajewski these intimations remain intimations, not explanations or descriptions. And here we are faced with the central problem of his poetry, which is the problem of poetry in the face of the mystical: the mystical experience is not loquacious. The poet may seek "the still point of the turning world," but stillness writes no poetry. What yearns to be expressed, rather, is the experience of waiting for the sudden heightening of consciousness; waiting for it, or remembering it, or lacking it. These are situations of pathos; and the main colors in Zagajewski's palette are loss, longing, and awe, lightened from time to time with shades of wit.

And there is a further problem with mysticism as a subject for poetry: it does not admit of much variation. Poetry thrives on themes that are at the same time simple and fertile: thus Shakespeare can write 154 sonnets about love, and Tennyson can write hundreds of stanzas on mourning, because the subject is at the same time universal enough to compel our interest and general enough to admit of new situations, new shadings. But the mystic moment is indescribable, incommensurable: that is why it is so longed for. Thus Zagajewski, as a poet of the mystical, is condemned to a kind of eternal recurrence of the same poem. To look at the ends of the poems in *Mysticism for Beginners* is to see his predicament:

> I've taken long walks,
> craving one thing only:
> lightning,
> transformation,
> you.
>
> I don't know how—
> the palm trees opened up my greedy heart.
>
> ...take me to Tierra del Fuego,
> take me where the rivers
> flow straight up, horizontal rivers
> flowing up and down.
>
> This moment, mortal as you or I,
> was full of boundless, senseless,
> silly joy, as if it knew
> something we didn't.



ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI BY DAVID SCHORR FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The destination of these poems is usually the same: the moment of opening out to the insensible object of the soul's yearning, whether it is described as "silly joy" or allegorized as "Tierra del Fuego." The poem wants to get to this point, and whatever it describes is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Zagajewski himself describes this phenomenon in one of the aphoristic essays in *Two Cities*, "The Untold Cynicism of Poetry": "The inner world, which is the absolute kingdom of poetry, is characterized by its inexpressibility. . . . What then does this inner world accomplish if in spite of its inexpressibility it wants more than anything to express itself? It uses cunning. It pretends that it is interested, oh yes, very interested, in external reality." What we have here, perhaps, is the natural evolution of Zagajewski's praise of solitude. In his earlier work, solitude stood in opposition to the collective and the public; and it was good. But now solitude and inwardness are considered in themselves, and they are difficult things. They verge on inexpressibility. As Zagajewski writes in "Lecture on Mystery":

> We do not know what poetry is. We do not know what suffering is. We do not know what death is.
>
> We do know what mystery is.

Even if we allow that this is true, it still leaves two possibilities for poetry. One is to make poetry describe its subject as attentively as possible: thus Shakespeare's sonnets do not tell us "what love is," but they bring us closer to such an understanding. The other possibility is to stand scrupulously back from the subject, honoring its inexpressibility. In this case, the ostensible subject of the poem—love, death, suffering—is no longer the real subject; rather, the subject is the author's consciousness in the face of this ultimate limitation. This is the kind of poetry Zagajewski writes. It is poetry that threatens to lead to silence.

But Zagajewski is in no danger of falling silent. He is not an otherworldly or ascetic mystic, who feels driven



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from this world by hints of another. His alienation is not radical, it is occasional. And in this, too, he is a poet of the liberal imagination: his vision of the mystical does not put everything at stake. Not for him wagers or leaps; he is content to see the lineaments of something higher peeking through the things of this world, without forcing it to reveal itself as a coherent structure.

The clearest sign of Zagajewski's attachment to the world is his wit. Mysticism and humor do not usually go together. But quick and memorable absurdities temper the darkness of much of Zagajewski's poetry:

> Practicing elocution like a timid
> Demosthenes,
> the Danube flows over flat stones.

> What are baroque churches? Deluxe
> health clubs for athletic saints.

> Now rain dictates
> a long, tedious lecture....

Sometimes Zagajewski is simply funny, as in the title of one poem: "Franz Schubert: A Press Conference." ("No, I'm not familiar with Wagner's music.") But more often his wit is employed to intimate a darkness without stating it, as in this miniature theodicy:

> At the Orthodox
> church in Paris, the last White
> gray-haired Russians pray to God, who
> is centuries younger than they and equally
> helpless.

Or this, about Stalinism:

> One day apes made their grab for power.
> Gold seal-rings,
> starched shirts,
> aromatic Havanas,
> feet squashed into patent leather.

Wit is even more evident in Zagajewski's prose. His most important achievement in prose is the development of a kind of very short essay, occasionally shrinking to aphorism, in which wit and irony can flourish. This is the style of "The Little Larousse," from *Solidarity, Solitude*, and "The New Little Larousse," from *Two Cities*. Here Zagajewski is very often brilliant:

> [The Poles] write books as if they were to be documents considered during a future peace conference that will decide the fate of Europe.

> Territorial conquests are not just changes in boundaries and the imposition of an unwanted government. They are also detectable when we cease to see the earth.

> The adjective is the indispensable guarantor of the individuality of people and things. I see a pile of melons at a fruit stand. For an opponent of adjectives, this matter presents no difficulty: "Melons are piled on the fruit stand." Meanwhile, one melon is as sallow as Talleyrand's complexion when he addressed the Congress of Vienna ... another has sunken cheeks, and is lost in a deep, mournful silence, as if it could not bear to part with the fields of Provence.

This side of Zagajewski's sensibility seems far removed from the yearning mystic. Indeed, it is what can make him attractive even to those readers who have little patience for epiphany; it gives evidence of an unconstrained, undogmatic intelligence. With its rapid and unlikely juxtapositions, wit tends to undermine certainty. When you begin to see God as an old Russian exile, or commissars as cigar-smoking apes, you have stolen their old authority; a doubleness of perspective has set in.

In this respect, wit is intimately bound up with the liberal imagination, and with sentimental poetry. In *Solidarity, Solitude*, Zagajewski writes that "one must think against oneself ... otherwise one is not free." But what is implied by this is that freedom of thought is more important than thinking rightly. Once the thinker becomes more devoted to his thinking than to his thought, dogma is impossible. And clearly the importance of thinking against oneself was brought home to Zagajewski living in a totalitarian state, where the stupidity and cruelty of the prevailing dogmas was plain.

What is left, then, is not correctness of thought, but nimbleness of thought. The Danube is not the Danube but Demosthenes; the rain is not the rain but a tedious professor. And the mystical is, perhaps, not the mystical at all, but merely a moment of contentment, a feeling, a shadow. This possibility hovers around the title poem of *Mysticism for Beginners*, itself a fine example of Zagajewski's philosophical wit:

> The day was mild, the light was generous.
> The German on the café terrace
> held a small book on his lap.
> I caught sight of the title:
> *Mysticism for Beginners.*
> Suddenly I understood that the swallows
> patrolling the streets of Montepulciano
> with their shrill whistles...
> and the dusk, slow and systematic,
> erasing the outlines of medieval houses,
> and olive trees on little hills...
> and any journey, any kind of trip,
> are only mysticism for beginners,
> the elementary course, prelude
> to a test that's been
> postponed.

Zagajewski does not disavow mysticism in this poem, but he makes it the subject of a melancholy lightness, and thus puts it at an immense remove from belief. It is the same thing that happens when Donne begins a poem about the Judgment Day with "At the round earth's imagined corners, blow/Your trumpets, angels": since we know that there are no corners, we start to question whether there are angels. Similarly, in Zagajewski, the unlikeliness of mysticism "for beginners," as if it were a hobby like woodworking, makes us wonder about mysticism itself. The test has been postponed. Or has it been cancelled? Perhaps the test was never scheduled at all.

And so the mystical for Zagajewski is never free from doubt. The last poem in his new book is a touching example of this:

> I walked through the medieval town
> in the evening or at dawn,
> I was very young or rather old.
> I didn't have a watch
> or a calendar, only my stubborn blood
> measured the endless expanse.
> I could begin life, mine
> or not mine, over,
> everything seemed easy,
> apartment windows were partway open,
> other fates ajar.
> It was spring or early summer,
> warm walls,
> air soft as an orange rind;
> I was very young or rather old,
> I could choose, I could live.

This is the emotional ground out of which mysticism grows; but here the poet sticks to what is empirical and indisputable, to the emotion itself. The ability of the man who aspires to certainty to stop short of certainty: this is the hallmark of the liberal intelligence. The "thinking against oneself" which gives rise to wit also gives rise to hesitancy in the face of the absolute and the infinite, even when they are devoutly desired. And for this reason, Zagajewski's verse is unsettled and unsettling. He puts the matter perfectly:

> Two contradictory elements meet in poetry: ecstasy and irony. The ecstatic element is tied to an unconditional acceptance of the world, including even what is cruel and absurd. Irony, in contrast, is the artistic representation of thought, criticism, doubt. Ecstasy is ready to accept the entire world; irony, following in the steps of thought, questions everything, asks tendentious questions, doubts the meaning of poetry and even of itself. Irony knows that the world is tragic and sad.

> That two such vastly different elements shape poetry is astounding and even compromising. No wonder almost no one reads poems. •



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some people. But I take Sante's point. I consider Stalin a standard for evil, therefore I am an apologist for the dark side of capitalism, and blind to the fact that downsizers and property developers are just as evil as Stalin; for if they acknowledged the Stalin within them, they would be better people, even though anyone who makes Stalin a standard for evil is an apologist for the dark side of capitalism. Stalin, not outside the pale of Sante's own experience? Then Brooklyn is much harsher than I, a pleasant Panglossian, knew.

## Different tracks

**To the editors:**

Nathan Glazer is a sage, but his lament about America's failure to invest billions of dollars of public money in high-speed rail passenger service is misplaced ("Off Track," February 16).

There have been two spectacular success stories particular to U.S. transportation policy in the past quarter-century. The first is our competitive, low-price air transportation system, which carries about 30 times as many passengers a day as Amtrak, without subsidy. The second is the remaking of the rail-freight industry, from actual and near collapse in the 1970s into the competitive and efficient industry it is today, one that has recaptured many lines of business it had lost 50 or more years ago (like transporting new cars from the factories). This, too, has been done largely without subsidy.

The economic payoff from massive public investment in high-speed rail lines in Europe and Asia has been very modest indeed. The economic payoff from American deregulation of transportation—air, rail, and motor freight—with little subsidy has been huge. And the environmental edge is almost certainly with U.S. policies.

DICK NETZER
*New York, New York*

**To the editors:**

After travelling last year from Paris to Bordeaux on the TGV, I was asking the same questions as Nathan Glazer. If we used the money we are frittering away on the idiotic space program, we could have all kinds of things to benefit the public, such as high-speed trains, a tunnel from Long Island to New Jersey, and so forth. All the billions spent on the moon landings amounted to nothing except a handful of rocks. No benefits to anyone, except to keep tens of thousands working in Florida, Alabama, Texas, and California.

HOWARD PURCELL
*Amagansett, New York*


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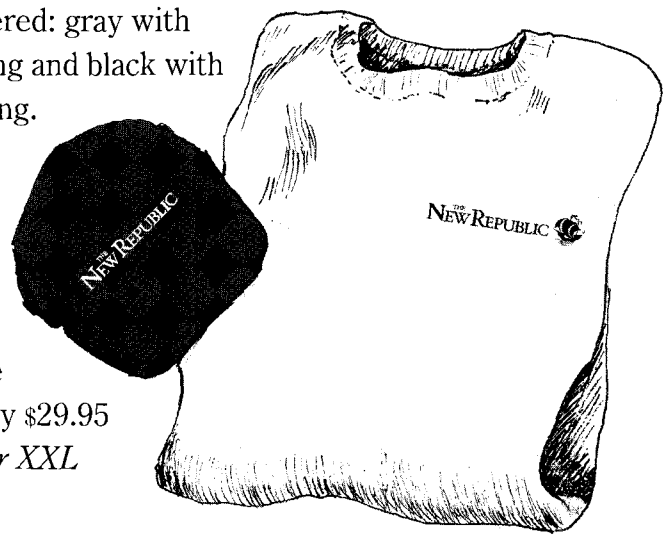


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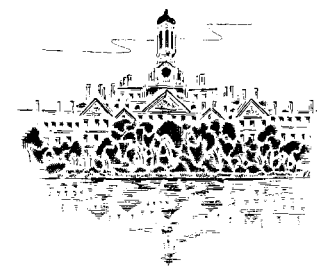
# CAMBRIDGE DIARIST

## Sane bombers

OUR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Michael Walzer published his *Just and Unjust Wars* 21 years ago, and his moral argument (with historical illustrations) has influenced not only philosophers and philosophically inclined citizens but also the U.S. military. It is studied at West Point and the other service academies, as well as at the various war colleges—where strategists and tacticians encounter the idea that humane and democratic societies must learn to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate military targets. Such societies are, in fact, defined by these distinctions. Hence the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Henry H. Shelton, quoted in a long *Washington Post* narrative of the administration's policy peregrinations leading up to the Kofi Annan mission to Baghdad: "If the target was in such a place that it would result in the deaths of a large number of civilians, then we did not recommend it." This is a very far cry from Curtis LeMay and his intentions to bomb the North Vietnamese into the stone age, and Americans should be proud that our armed forces are governed, or at least constrained, by such exacting standards.

STILL, EVEN IN JUST WARS, THERE can be no certainty that American force will cause no civilian deaths, and there shouldn't be. After all, the Allies won World War II against the Axis powers with a strategy that massively engaged the military of the enemy countries but also flattened cities and towns. Of course, this was a war waged against powers—Hitler Germany and Imperial Japan—which had no qualms about aiming their weapons explicitly and deliberately at civilians. Sometimes the bombing of German cities by the British was simply to demoralize the civilian population—or, as Churchill himself put it, "the severe, ruthless bombing of Germany on an ever-increasing scale will ... create conditions intolerable to the mass" of Germans. Not exactly strategic bombing. And, though begun at a moment of dire military prospects for the Allies, it went on long past the moment when Allied victory seemed inevitable. Such terror, which is what it was, was also, then, unnecessary. But, "if one is forced to bomb cities," Walzer writes, "it is best to acknowledge that one has also been forced to kill the innocent."

THE U.S. NEVER CONTEMPLATED the notion of simply bombing cities in Iraq. And, of course, there was never even a hint of Churchillian vengeance in American thinking. So what persuaded Bill Clinton and his advisers that the U.S. should bomb nothing? Surely not the fear of American losses, a fear that has paralyzed Pentagon thinking for 25 years: Iraq's degraded air defenses pose little peril to our pilots. One justification offered for choosing the highly ambiguous script Secretary of State Albright wrote for the U.N. secretary-general is, ostensibly, a calculus of proportionality. But, in this instance, it was not at all a serious calculus of whether the relatively small number of civilian deaths from our bombing would be justified by the gains that would be won against the regime of Saddam Hussein, especially in terms of the destruction of his remaining conventional weapons. It was, rather, a general anxiety about the use of force disguised as a calculus. Remember, Saddam's is a genocidal regime. Any calculus of proportionality must weigh this fact very heavily. How many more thousands of Kurds and Shia must Saddam murder before this hapless majority of Iraq's population gets factored in to the equation? Then, of course, one has also to consider the foreign enemies of Iraq—the Iranians, the Israelis, the Kuwaitis, even the head-in-the-sand Saudis—for whom Saddam no doubt envisions an agonizing appointment with anthrax.



THE UNAVOIDABLE SUFFERING OF the Iraqi people in the event of continued sanctions or U.S. bombing is invoked to silence those who muster the hard-to-imagine, almost sci-fiish, images of death by germs and toxins. But who exactly is this Iraqi people? Most of them are not considered by the Iraqi government to be genuine Iraqis at all, and—if truth be told—the Kurds and Shia see themselves not as citizens of an Iraqi state but as subjects of the Iraqi tyranny. The "Iraqi people" is a mere social construction and the state of Iraq itself a vestige of the post-World War I British imperium. The empire brought to Baghdad, after he had been chased from Damascus by the French, a Sunni prince to rule over a country in which the Sunnis were few. A British colonial servant, Gertrude Bell, made this prince a king. Intergroup carnage was the country's fate until his house was overthrown in 1958.

ANOTHER COHORT FROM THE Sunni minority installed themselves as rulers, this time ruling in the name of a republic. But, like all republics in the Arab world, that republic was not real. The Kurds of the north and the Shia of the south were, and are, brutally excluded from power and from true politics. That is why they want out. In his day, George Bush believed in the territorial integrity of Iraq, the integrity of a map of servitude. Are we to deduce from the fact that Clinton did nothing when Baghdad invaded the Kurdish refuge in the north, which we ourselves had initiated, that he too believes in the integrity of that map? That map, it is clear, is not morally meaningful. It is a legal fiction embraced by men and women who will not see, for God-only-knows whatever reason, that it gives cover to a vast and ongoing butchery by Saddam.

THE CLINTON ADministration has been in office for more than five years. Saddam's regime has not changed at all. It has continually violated the provisions of the agreement under which it was allowed to survive after the Gulf war. And it has brutalized peoples whose safety we had guaranteed. There was virtually nothing which the U.S. did during this period to bring Saddam down. Albright called the tyrant Hitler but in the end was accommodated to his survival. The ink is barely dry on Kofi Annan's signature to the accord. But already the dictatorship has its own reading of its meanings. This was predictable; it was written to ease the path of the dictator into the provisions which the secretary of state gave as instructions to the man she had promoted as the world's top civil servant. But between Annan's blithe flexibility and the stringent demeanor of Richard Butler there is only one ethical option. *The New York Times* reports that Al Gore wanted Saddam accused as a war criminal. This would give us warrant, methodically and assiduously, to undermine his rule. But neither the president nor the secretary of state, nor the amateur "give peace a chance" national security adviser, Sandy Berger, thought it appropriate or prudent. This shows that they are not planning Saddam's overthrow but are hoping he will behave. An empty wish, a cruel delusion. Sooner or later, our bombs will fall on Iraq, with targets more hardened and civilians more exposed. That is the deal we have made with ourselves.

**MARTIN PERETZ**



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**Where We Stand**

*A commentary on public education and other critical issues*

# Think Small!

**By SANDRA FELDMAN, President**
**American Federation of Teachers**

Class size has been a hot issue for years—especially for parents and teachers. It seems like common sense that students learn better in smaller classes where the teacher has more time for each child. But up until now, we haven't had conclusive evidence that smaller classes are more effective. People who hold the purse strings have generally dismissed them as a big waste of money or—when unions fought to get smaller classes—as a ploy to make things easier for teachers.

As a result, many public school students, and especially poor kids in inner-city schools, have been crowded into classes of 30, 35, or even 40 students. And many parents who had the money have pulled their kids out and enrolled them in private schools—no problem getting small classes there.

Now, reducing class size in the early grades is on the national agenda because President Clinton included it in his State of the Union education package. And governors of both parties are saying they want to reduce class size—some have already done so.

What caused the turnaround? A number of recent studies show that parents and teachers were right all along: Smaller class size really works. In the early grades, all children learn better in classes of 15 to 17 students, and the gains are even greater for poor children in inner-city schools. Here's what the new studies tell us:

- **Effects that last into high school**—"One of the great experiments in education"—that's what eminent Harvard economist, Frederick Mosteller, calls STAR, the Tennessee class-size study. STAR researchers analyzed the achievement levels of K-3 students who were randomly assigned to classes of 13 to 17. They found that kids in small classes did much better than students in regular classes in math and reading, every year and in all grades. The small classes made the biggest difference in the scores of children in inner-city schools. Researchers are still following students who participated in the experiment, and they've found that the benefits of small classes in the early years last at least into high school—long after students are back in regular-size classes.

- **16-point advantage for African-American boys**—SAGE, a Wisconsin program, begun in 1996-97, reduces class size for K-3 children in certain high-poverty schools. At the end of the first year, SAGE kids had made significantly greater improvements in reading, language arts, and math than children in similar schools. African-American boys did especially well: Their total scores went up 56 points compared with 39.4 for students in comparison schools.

*Parents and teachers were right about class size all along.*

- **Half a year difference in fourth-grade math**—Harold Wenglinsky, a researcher who analyzed fourth- and eighth-grade math scores on the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress, found that "fourth graders in smaller-than-average classes are about half a year ahead of fourth graders in larger-than-average classes," with the "largest effects" (three-fourths of a year ahead) for low-income students in urban areas. And the effects are even more substantial for urban eighth graders.

- **Who says vouchers are better?**—Princeton professor Cecilia Rouse did a careful study of student performance in Milwaukee elementary schools—both public schools and those accepting vouchers. She found that public school students in certain special schools where the pupil-teacher ratio was reduced to 17 to 1 progressed as well as voucher students in math. And they made "substantially faster" progress in reading than voucher students. They are poor, minority kids, just like the students in voucher schools.

## We know what works

Are smaller classes a good idea, particularly in the early years? These studies answer that question once and for all. They confirm what many parents and teachers always maintained. And they show that smaller classes are especially valuable for poor children. This should make the people who talk about using vouchers to "save" a few poor students—by sending them to private schools with small classes—stop to think. Reducing class size could help districts get these good results for all their children, not just a few.

We already know what works to raise student achievement: high academic standards and proven programs taught by teachers who are well prepared to carry them out. Now we know that smaller class size works. None of these things by itself is a panacea, but together they can do the job for our kids—if the adults in charge have the intelligence and determination to use them. ■

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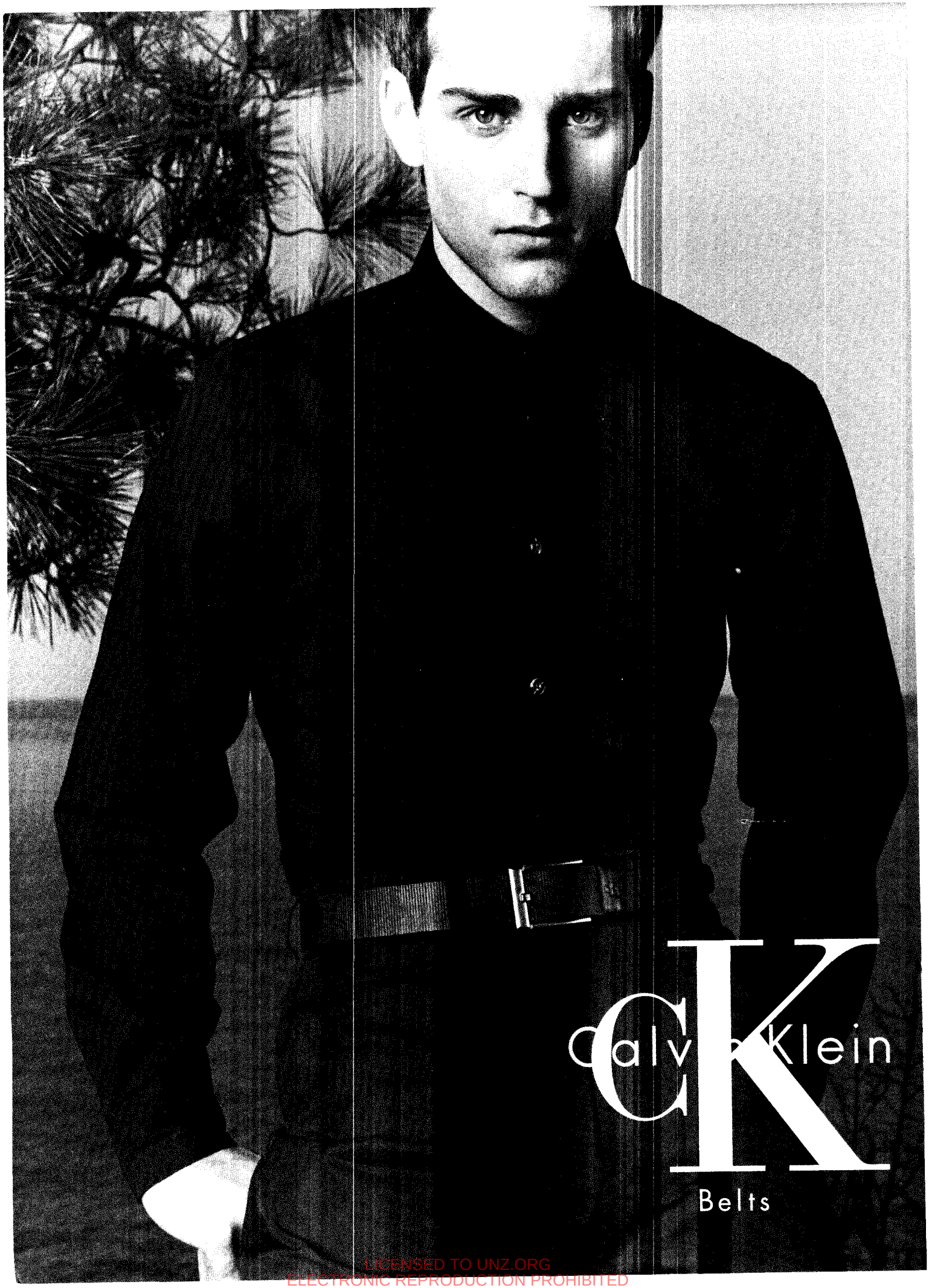


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